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*IN THE APOSTOLIC AGE.*

BY

ROBERT A. WATSON, M.A., D.D.

**L**ondon:

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# IN THE APOSTOLIC AGE:

*THE CHURCHES AND THE DOCTRINE.*

BY

ROBERT A. WATSON, M.A., D.D.,

AUTHOR OF

“GOSPELS OF YESTERDAY,” “JUDGES AND RUTH,” AND “THE BOOK OF JOB”  
IN “EXPOSITOR’S BIBLE,” ETC.



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## PREFATORY NOTE

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THE Editor hopes to include in the series of *Books for Bible Students* three or four volumes (of which this is the first) designed to give a sketch of the history and development of the Christian Church from the age of the apostles to the present day. These Manuals are not intended to set forth any denominational view of ecclesiastical history or organisation, and will be written by members of different branches of the Church.

Contributors to this series write with entire independence, and each is responsible only for the opinions he himself expresses. The Editor, whilst offering occasional suggestions, has never sought to hamper the scholars whose co-operation he has been so fortunate as to secure. On many points, especially of exposition, those who strive together for the faith of the gospel must be free to express diverse views. A true Bible student will know how to value this revelation of the thoughts of many hearts concerning the things pertaining to the kingdom of God.

A. E. G.



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# IN THE APOSTOLIC AGE: THE CHURCHES AND THE DOCTRINE.



## CHAPTER I.

### BEGINNINGS OF DOCTRINE AND OF THE CHURCH.

THE subject we have in view, the development of Christianity during the apostolic period, differs considerably from a history of the apostolic Church. It will not be necessary to enter fully into the personal life and influence of the leaders, nor to examine the bearing of every incident; nor will the whole ground covered by early evangelistic work have to be brought under survey. There will be no need, for instance, to inquire particularly into the events of the day of Pentecost, the circumstances of Stephen's martyrdom, the relations of Barnabas, Mark, and Luke to St. Paul. Starting with the origin of doctrine during our Lord's life on earth, we shall

see how points of belief successively came into view, how they assumed dogmatic form, gained acceptance, and became catholic. We shall note the experiments that went along with the expansion of the Church, the settlement of its order, the observances by which its fellowship was enriched.

The spirit of Christianity should have made it, from the first, free, progressive, unconventional; and it was indeed apprehended more or less as a law of liberty by all who followed "The Way." There was nothing in the temple service, and very little in that of the synagogue, to hamper the Christian congregation, or *ecclesia*, in arranging its affairs. At first, indeed, belief in Jesus as the Redeemer of the Hebrew people alone, a form of the new faith which many held exclusively, tended to limit freedom and retard progress. The Hebrews who became Christians could not assume independence in thought and worship, as if the old covenant had been entirely superseded by the new revelation. Some of the leaders never understood that it was their part to move forward boldly, unfettered by precedents, having regard to the great future promised to the Church. These points we shall have to notice, and the conflict of opinion and diversity of practice, out of which gradually arose the conception and order of a free society, no longer

subordinate to Judaism, or standing aloof from it in partial dissent, but equipped for a separate career of world-wide effort and influence. How the expression of doctrine, hindered at first by the narrow Judæo - Messianic view of Christ, took a larger sweep ; how the Church escaped by degrees from the shadow of the temple ; how the stream issuing from the divine fountainhead—"the spiritual Rock that followed them, which Rock was Christ"—gathered power in its free and generous flow,—these things will appear in our inquiry. But we shall not have to pass to the later course of the heavenly stream, when, partly to serve the uses of life, partly for the pride of men, it was divided and led away in various channels, its liberty impaired, its brightness sullied by earthly elements.

The significant words used by St. John in comparing the work of Christ with the work of Moses—"grace and truth came by Jesus Christ"—describe well the scope of our Lord's ministry. The fulness of redeeming grace, and the truth which brings liberty and light, were His gifts to the world. He was not a lawgiver as Moses was, but something greater. His revelation supplied the elements of law, the principles of moral order, the facts on which responsibility,

duty, salvation are based. With His revelation, all development, individual, social, national, became possible. There is no vigour in righteousness, no purity in life, no mercy and generosity, no enjoyment of existence that men may not hope to reach. "In Him are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge." "He was made from God unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption."—With this belief we begin.

And our inquiry turns first to that fellowship in faith and work which during the apostolic period came under definite rules and conditions.

It has often been said, as by the author of *Ecce Homo*, that Christ instituted a society, "that to organise a society, and to bind the members of it together by the closest ties, were the business of His life."<sup>1</sup> Baptism is declared to have been a solemn initiation, from which He refused absolutely to give any one a dispensation. In view of the society, we are told, "He called men away from their homes, imposed upon some a wandering life, upon others the sacrifice of their property, and endeavoured by all means to divorce them from their former connections, that they might find a new home in the Church." These statements go beyond the fact; and the

<sup>1</sup> *Ecce Homo*, ch. ix.

writer has to admit that "the one thing which Christ required was a certain personal attachment to Himself, a fidelity or loyalty": he has also to admit that baptism is seldom mentioned in the accounts of our Lord's life: "we do not read, for example, of the baptism of the principal disciples." Yet again he has seen clearly and found it his duty to emphasise the truth that the Christian is a law to himself.

As in the teaching of our Lord, so in the Christian life, there are many paradoxes. It is, however, needless to multiply them as *Ecce Homo* did; and whatever arguments may be adduced to prove that Christ organised a society, the whole subject will be simplified, and the fact better represented, by keeping to our Lord's own statement of His mission—that He came to reveal the kingdom of God. The main thing, the sublime reality, is this kingdom of God. Christian faith and fellowship here, the Church on earth and its doctrines, are phases, means, temporary and subordinate developments; that which abides and will abide for ever is the kingdom of God. Christ gave that, not in picture and parable only, but in spiritual fact and power to the world.

A church is an association of persons who profess faith in Christ, subordinate to a certain

government administered by men, and explicit rules which have been agreed upon by those who constitute or those who guide the society. In this sense no church existed during our Lord's life. He neither made nor applied definite regulations for the admission of men to the circle of His apostles or disciples. Each of the Twelve was called personally, and the call was his ordination. No office-bearers were appointed over the fluctuating numbers of men and women who gathered about Christ as disciples. The apostles had no authority while He lived—were indeed incapable of exercising it. As their name implies, they were *men sent* to carry the tidings of the advent, and proclaim the kingdom of God. The name disciples, again, was not rigidly restrictive. Any one who came to hear, and showed a disposition to obey, was a disciple. The fellowship was that of learners, brethren who sat together at Christ's feet.

Our Lord taught what fellowship should be by His words and example, and purified it by His rebukes and ethical directions. More than that, He gave the idea of brotherhood in faith and love, the brotherhood of those who, believing in Himself and loving God, were to be like members of a united family. In this way He laid the foundations of the Church; and on one occasion,

at least, He spoke of it in a passage that may be called prophetic. But the kingdom of God or of Heaven was always in His mind, and His teaching constantly bore on the nature and power of that sublime theocracy which the name represented. This kingdom, He said, is inward, spiritual, and cometh not with observation. Men may discover it after long search, or find it as if casually. They may seek it as one seeks a pearl of great price, or be included in it as fishes in a net. It is a divine fact put within their reach, or laid hold of with enthusiasm, with a rush, as when the multitudes went after Christ to hear Him. It extends wherever the power of His life and the truths of His gospel extend. Men know themselves to be in it when they realise the fact that God rules; and they enjoy its liberty when they understand that His government is unspeakably gracious, and accept His way of grace.

The terms in which Christ speaks of the kingdom of Heaven do not define the Church visible or invisible. The Church did not extend secretly as leaven hid in meal, but openly by formal admission of members, after instruction and profession of faith sealed by baptism. The Church is not within us, but outward, and often much in evidence by means of its places of

worship, reports, statistics, organizations. Christ left the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's Supper; He laid down the duties of human intercourse, and made love its law; He presented an object for the Church's existence. In these ways He prepared for what was to come. He introduced men and women into fellowship with Himself and with the Father. He declared the principles of life individual and social, moral and spiritual, and made that life possible by His personal influence on every soul. He gave the life and promised the more abundant life. But on His departure those who believed in Him had to institute the Church. They had to find a *modus vivendi*, a way of living and co-operating with each other. They had to settle on what terms they should worship together and work together; who should be of the association; in what way they should exert their strength and employ their enthusiasm; what should be done in their meetings; how their Church should be ruled. The experiments began early, and have been going on ever since. We are still endeavouring to make our churches useful in the highest sense to the human race, perfect instruments of the Spirit, serviceable to the kingdom of God.

Assuming, then, that while Christ was on earth there was no Church in our sense of the



word, assuming that organization was still in the future—"on this rock I *will build* My Church"—we now proceed to another point, that of doctrine. And here a similar affirmation has to be made—*Christ stated no doctrines*. He prepared for them, gave the *data* of dogmatic theology, provided all the elements of a Christian creed; but He did not frame and lay down what we call doctrines.

For what is a doctrine in the accepted meaning of the word? It is a statement of truth as seen by the human mind after reflection. A doctrine sets forth the result of our thought about spiritual realities. The fact is one thing—the doctrine another. Truth is one thing—doctrinal statement of truth another. Christ gave facts in His life, truths in His teaching. We reason about them, set them beside each other, settle and state so far as we can the meanings of the facts, the bearings of the truth. So we frame what we call the doctrines of the Christian religion, the Christian creed.

The Church is Christian society organized in a way more or less defined, by human adaptation of means to ends. Christ Himself appoints the ends: men settle how they are to be attained. It is part of the discipline of believers to seek harmonious association with each other in the

service of God and of humanity. And doctrine and creed are spiritual facts, interpreted and set forth under the guidance of the Spirit of God, after the human mind has considered them and found some assurance of their meaning.

Our Lord asked of His disciples on one occasion, "Who say ye that I am?" His life among them had revealed fact as to His nature; He had taught spiritual truth. But the doctrine had to be stated by the disciples themselves after reflection, as a result of the application of their own intelligence and reason to the facts observed and the truths received. The question had its reply: Peter answered, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." That, as we shall see, was not the first statement of a doctrine of the person of Christ. The disciples had been all along thinking about their Master, who He was, what His relation was to God; and occasionally they had put their thought into words. But the important thing here is that Christ encouraged the formation of doctrine, invited the disciples to come to a conclusion, and to put that conclusion about His person into a form of words of their own.

Sometimes it is said that doctrine is superfluous; not only that we might dispense with doctrines, but that we should be far better

without them. The answer is, partly, that our Lord Himself sought to elicit an answer in doctrinal form; and partly, that the only thorough way of learning is by reflection on the deeds and words of Christ, and repeated attempts to state in our own language what they seem to mean. No doubt error may result. Human intelligence fails in the attempt to represent divine fact. In the development of Christian doctrine, there has been much ignorant work—over-minuteness in expression, Pharisaic restriction, misinterpretation of truth, false colouring of fact. Still the attempt at doctrinal accuracy is in the way of progress.

Now a Church, as it is the means of promoting Christian fellowship, also helps the development of doctrine and the education that accompanies it. For this reason, therefore, one of the first things to be done after our Lord's withdrawal from the world was the formation, in a simple way, of a Church or eclectic society by those who believed in the kingdom of God and the gospel of Christ. They wished reassurance in their belief; they needed to consider and reconsider among themselves what the words of the Lord meant, what His will was. The influences around were hostile to faith, and they had to create an atmosphere friendly to it.

Spiritual truth was seen in dim outline ; they had to bring it out in clear symbolism. The gatherings of the disciples for prayer and consultation, in the interval between the resurrection and ascension of Christ, were the beginning, and partly fixed the membership, of the society of believers. After the ascension those gatherings continued and became periodical. Then pledges of sincerity in faith were required ; elders and deacons were appointed. The creation of the Church in this manner was necessary ; it was also providential. In no other way could Christians have advanced in knowledge, and at the same time retained such unity of faith as would have made the gospel a power in the world.

As to the beginnings of doctrine, examples may be found in the first three Gospels, of the way in which the disciples gradually formed and expressed definite opinions regarding Christ and His work. It cannot be affirmed that the conclusions to which they came before our Lord's departure were very numerous. They had observed His life, but much of its significance had escaped them. They had heard wonderful words as in a dream ; they saw the death through blinding tears ; the resurrection dazzled them. It is plain that their creed, until Christ left the world, must have been brief and imperfect.

Many of the articles of it were, however, of the first importance—that He was the Messiah of Hebrew prophecy; that He was the Son of God; that His name and power were to bring redemption to Israel. The resurrection-life of our Lord added new facts and elements of faith; but these, and the interpretation of them which He Himself supplied, as to the two whom He instructed on the way to Emmaus, did not pass into distinct doctrine until some time had elapsed.

On the Sea of Galilee, when the tempest had been calmed at Christ's word, the disciples who were with Him asked in amazement, "What manner of man is this, that even the wind and the sea obey Him?" It was a question of reflection, of interest quickened by the thrill of astonishment. But they did not venture at once to state a belief that Jesus was Lord of nature. We can see how far short they came of any such conviction in this, that soon afterwards, a multitude having followed Him unto a desert place, the disciples prayed Him to send the people away, that they might go into the villages and buy themselves food. Reflection had not led to any clear general idea of His power to meet the exigency of the hour. Another scene on the lake showed progress in faith and

conviction. The disciples were in their boat "in the midst of the sea." They saw Him coming to them in the dim morning light. Peter said, "Lord, if it be Thou, bid me come unto Thee upon the water." To Peter at least Christ appeared at that moment Lord of the forces of nature; and almost immediately afterwards, when the men found themselves in safety, of their own accord they said, "Of a truth Thou art the Son of God." True, the scope of the statement, "Jesus, our Master, is the Son of God," was confined almost entirely to the conviction that some of the power over nature which belongs to the Almighty dwelt in Christ, as the striking characteristics and authority of a father may dwell in his son. Yet there was movement towards the doctrine of the person of Christ, which has in the course of time become a most important branch of Christian theology.

Another illustration may be taken—the slow advance of thought regarding the significance of our Lord's death. In St. Matthew, ch. xvi., it is recorded: "From that time began Jesus to show unto His disciples how that He must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and the third day be raised up." A declaration like this certainly required much reflection. But

the first disclosure of our Lord's early death, though the resurrection also was predicted, appears to have caused bitter disappointment. That very act of self-devotion, which was to crown the work of Christ, and bring the fulness of His spiritual power to bear on the world—that sacrifice by which the indifference and earthliness of men were to be overcome, and atonement made between heaven and earth—was regarded as a calamity. Not only was there no approach to a doctrine of sacrifice in the minds of the apostles, but Peter turned on Christ with the hasty rebuke: "Be it far from Thee, Lord; this shall never be unto Thee." The vision on the Mount of Transfiguration soon after left the three disciples in amazement. They heard, as in a dream, something said about the decease Christ was to accomplish in Jerusalem; but they could not connect death with glory. Again, their failure to apprehend the great issues of their Master's life is evident from the question they addressed to Him: "Why, then, say the scribes that Elijah must first come?" Is Christ to die and rise from the dead? They cannot see what good that will do. The old tradition about Elijah has more interest than the great event for which the Lord sought to prepare them. Not till after the sacrifice has been

offered, do they begin, under the pressure of necessity, to gather an explanation of its meaning, to understand what He had said : " Except a grain of wheat fall into the earth and die, it abideth by itself alone ; but if it die, it beareth much fruit."

It may be asked : If the apostles of Christ had no right understanding of His life and its purpose till after the resurrection and ascension, how is it that we have in the Gospels pictures so clear of the supernatural Christ ? How came these memorials of things said and done, that seem explicable only if the witnesses had been aware from the first what was required in the final issue, how the life needed to be shown in order that the sacrifice might stand out as its crown and seal ? To this the answer seems to be, that the facts and sayings recorded in the Gospels were fixed in the memory of the disciples, apart from any imperfect theory of their meaning. Nothing is clearer than the straightforwardness of the synoptical Gospels. The alleged tendencies, here Ebionite, there universalistic, are not made out. In simple good faith the memorable *logia* and the incidents of the life of our Lord were recalled and reported as they had impressed themselves on undogmatic minds. Had the attempt to philosophise and arrange gone far at an early date, the result would have



coloured the narratives. They are all the more wonderful and evidentially valuable that the witnesses had no system, and may even have failed to understand and retain some hints of meaning which would have been significant for doctrinal purposes.

The Fourth Gospel is certainly different. Written, perhaps, fifty or sixty years after our Lord's life on earth, the Gospel of St. John belongs to the time when Christian doctrine had made considerable progress. Now there is reflection about many incidents, and the reflection has a distinctly dogmatic cast. The opening passage of the Gospel is entirely of this nature. The writer appears no longer as a disciple reporting simply what the Lord had said and done. He is a teacher with the unction of the Spirit. He uses his right as one who has thought earnestly and is divinely guided to knowledge of the truth. He can explain what Christ said by events that followed His departure; he has a theory of the Redeemer's glory.<sup>1</sup> Occasionally it is difficult to separate from the sayings of Christ the doctrinal interpretations of the apostle, which are not out of place, but, on the other hand, carry the authority of inspiration.

Before passing from this brief review of

<sup>1</sup> St. John ii. 11.

origins, special attention must be given to the one passage in which our Lord speaks prophetically of His Church. The confession of Peter—"Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God"—was by far the most important doctrinal statement made before our Saviour's departure. To this, then, as the corner-stone of the structure of doctrine, Christ attached great importance, and the passage we are to consider is the declaration that followed: "Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-Jonah: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but My Father which is in heaven. And I also say unto thee, that thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build My Church; and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it. I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of Heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven" (Matt. xvi. 17-19, R.V.).

Here we notice, first, that the confession, based on the apostle's observation of our Lord's words and life, is acknowledged to be a revelation, God-given, inspired. Peter is declared a prophet, with the prophet's blessedness. Then, as Professor Bruce has said,<sup>1</sup> the declaration of Christ

<sup>1</sup> *The Kingdom of God*, p. 262.

implies, first, "that the Church to be founded was to be Christian; or, to put it otherwise, the person of the Founder was of fundamental importance." Our Lord meant, "I am indeed the Christ, the Son of the living God; and you, Peter, and all who like you hold this belief, will sustain the rising temple of My Church." Is it implied that Jesus claimed to be the Messiah of Jewish prophecy and hope? Yet His Messiahship is not equivalent to His Christhood. For the Christhood of Jesus is not limited by the hopes of the Old Testament, nor does Christ literally fulfil many of the predictions of Hebrew prophets commonly attached to the Messiah. The name Christ as used by Peter, still more as we use it, is practically a new name, filled gradually with meaning, as the scope of the gospel, the nature of the mediatorial work of our Lord, and the spirituality of His salvation, came to be understood. "Son of the living God" is also a name pregnant with germinal doctrine. It implies that the life of God, His presence, power, and will, have been unfolded in a unique way by Christ. The Church is to be built on these truths. It is to be Christ's Church, the Church of the Son of the living God.

The next thing, according to Professor Bruce, implied in our Lord's declaration, is that the

Christian Church should be "practically identical with the kingdom of God." This, however, does not agree with our conclusions. As we have seen, the language used by Christ in speaking of the kingdom of God does not apply to the Church. The kingdom of God is far greater and more spiritual than any Church that has ever existed. When our Lord says, "I will give thee the keys of the kingdom of Heaven," He does not mean the same as if He said, "I will give thee the keys of the Church."

Peter's confession of faith, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God," gave him a high prerogative. What was it? To admit men into the Church? As things fell out, as Christ knew they would fall out, that would have been no great honour. The extraordinary development of the Church four or five centuries after this, and the magnificence that began to be associated with its services, reflected a false light on its early condition, and overbore the fact that much of iron and clay was mingled with its gold and silver. Even in the second decade, St. Paul was saying, on this very point, concerning one church whose members were contentious: "I thank God that I baptized none of you, save Crispus and Gaius, lest any man should say that ye were baptized into my name. And I baptized

also the house of Stephanas" (1 Cor. i. 14-16). The common habit of venerating the Church ignores that imperfection which must cling to every organization of human elements.

But the kingdom of Heaven—that is something higher, finer, grander! Of that we cannot speak with too much reverence. That is God's dominion, the sphere of His grace, the theatre of His benignant providence, of His everlasting mercy. And when Christ said, "I will give unto thee"—not, I give, but I *will* give, by and by, when thou knowest My gospel aright—"I will give thee the keys of the kingdom of Heaven"—He promised an honour far greater than that of directing the affairs of the Church: that is to say, the office and privilege of proclaiming intelligibly, from the heart to the heart, God's mercy, God's way of salvation, so that men, believing, might pass into the light and liberty of the heavenly life. "I will give unto thee the keys"—by and by thou shalt be an evangelist, a preacher of the glorious gospel. Thou shalt fling wide the doors by thy preaching, and many shall enter.

The office of the true evangelist, who with a sound creed and living faith assures others of Divine salvation, is indeed one of the highest prerogatives with which man was ever charged.

In this St. Paul gloried—"Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel." Simon Peter was to receive it, but not to the exclusion of others. The gift of the evangelist cannot be reserved to one or to a few. The gospel is free, and the opening of the doors is in the power of all who have received the gospel, who understand it, and can offer it in faith to their fellow-men.

The third point, that of the binding and loosing, presents no little difficulty. To say that Christ promises to the Church in all its judgments the sanction of heavenly righteousness, implies too much. No Church, nor conclave of the best and wisest leaders of any Church, exercising the power of binding—say, of binding men to certain articles of belief, or restraining them by certain laws and regulations—has ever used that power so that the decisions did not need review in the court of Heaven. Whatever is promised must lie within the limits allowed by Divine prerogative to human acts, acts of faith and love, of holy authority springing from the earnest desire to serve mankind. The binding must mean putting restraint on ambition and passion, on violence and wrong. The loosing must signify introducing men to gospel liberty and hope. What St. Peter and all

servants of truth like him were to do, in and through the Church, to advance the redeeming work of God, would be directed, overruled, and blessed by Him who makes no errors, whose judgment is irrevocable and eternal.

## CHAPTER II.

### THE FIRST TWELVE YEARS IN JERUSALEM.

**N**UMERICALLY small, to all appearance casual and without influence, was the first gathering of believers after our Lord's ascension. They did not meet, however, under any shadow of doubt or disappointment. Words lingered in their minds that carried desire and hope into a wonderful future, in which they had unbounded faith. "Ye shall receive power when the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem and in all Judæa and Samaria, and unto the uttermost parts of the earth." . . . "This Jesus, which was received up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye beheld Him going into heaven." Their first duty was to wait for the coming of the Holy Spirit, whom Christ had promised to be their Friend and Comforter, their Guide into all truth. How they imagined the



advent of this Paraclete, we can only conjecture. There must have been some vague expectation of a new presence, another life that would bring its holy influence to bear on them, a heavenly voice revealing divine things not as yet known. Beyond, lay their task of witness-bearing, in which, as Christ had promised (St. John xv. 26), the Holy Spirit was to aid and support them. The extent of that witnessing they scarcely comprehended; but they knew it was to be the work of their lives. Then they had, to sustain them in duty, the hope of the return of Christ to take His place as Messianic Head of the tribes of Israel. It was for prayer the little company of believers met, and the Master's promise guided their supplication.

Of the groups that constituted the first gathering of the Christian society, that of the apostles was central and chief. The eleven were there, men whose faith and devotion had revived after severe trial, agreed on the whole as to the testimony they bore concerning their ascended Lord. With them were James, Joses, and Simon, who are uniformly called the brethren of Jesus, and always, where mentioned together, associated with Mary His mother. Of these three men, sons of Joseph perhaps by a former marriage, we know that for a considerable part

of the ministry of Jesus they had refused to believe in Him, although they appear to have followed His career with some solicitude. It is stated by St. Paul (1 Cor. xv. 7), that after His resurrection our Lord showed Himself to James, and this event must have carried to the mind of the doubter a certainty that nothing could afterwards overturn; he saw and believed. The brothers Joses and Simon have no special notice in the subsequent history. James, however, became by and by head of the Church in Jerusalem; and the character of his faith had a most important influence on Judæan Christianity. Persuaded late, almost against his will, one would suppose, he became a sincere believer in Christ; yet the personality of Jesus and the spiritual originality of His teaching do not appear to have carried James, even in the course of years, far beyond the circle of Jewish ideas and hopes.

The third group was composed of women, of whom Mary the mother of our Lord is alone named. Others were likely those mentioned in the Gospel of St. Luke, Mary Magdalene, Joanna, and Mary the mother of the Apostle James. Here we have a fact significant in many ways. Jewish custom not seclude women. Still, in the temple and in synagogues, they worshipped

by themselves; and no provision was made by the law for their taking part in consultations or decisions of any public kind. Now, in the first Christian gathering, women had their place side by side with the apostles. This created an equality in privilege never before dreamt of, and gave the councils of Christianity a more gracious element than Judaism allowed. No doubt, the fact that Mary, our Lord's mother, was one of the women, had much to do with the welcome extended to them when they appeared in the upper chamber. Mary's right to be present could be denied by none. Her tender affection and earnest thought had followed Jesus all His life; her heart had been pierced as by a sharp sword when He hung on the cross; her motherly love had passed into reverence and wistful devotion. Who more than she had a claim to take part in any gatherings and consultations that had their origin in love to Him, and sought the fulfilment of His design? With Mary all womanhood found entrance into the inner circle of the Christian society; yet not solely on her account, for there were other ministering women whose faith had often cheered our Lord during His life on earth.

The first meeting of Christians, then, brought together not by any careful plan, but in the

simplest way, determined much, far more than was seen at the time, in regard to the constitution of the primitive Church. It practically decided that the apostles were not to act by themselves. There was to be no division like that between clergy and laity: all believers, all who had real interest in affairs, were to have their part in the decisions and activities of the Christian society. And this was confirmed at the next meeting of which we have any record.

During the short space of a week or thereby, the gathering of the believers in Jesus Christ, who sought fellowship in prayer, had greatly increased. From some twenty the number had grown to one hundred and twenty. With numbers came fresh vigour and the desire to act; and action took the shape of filling up the official circle of the twelve apostles, which seemed incomplete since Judas fell away. Peter accordingly proposed, and the others agreed, to appoint one to the vacant place. Two were found who had been disciples from the beginning, and were witnesses of the resurrection. Prayer was offered for Divine guidance, and then, by lot, or what we should call ballot, Matthias was elected. There was apparently no formal ordination, for as yet the laying on of hands was not practised; Matthias was simply numbered among the apostles.

The Christians were thus already a self-governing society. Relying on the grace of God, with quiet decisiveness they advanced in the way they thought best. It cannot be said that they had any special inspiration or guarantee in this election. Matthias never, so far as we know, distinguished himself as an apostle. In point of fact, one not chosen by the Church, Saul of Tarsus, became the twelfth. The whole history of the churches during the apostolic period shows, along with the inspiration of certain men, a human element, a popular element which made trial of methods and ideas. The simplicity of the Christians and their honest loyal intention are the features that strike us. The early Church was not essentially different from the churches of to-day.

It is necessary now to consider the relation in which the Christians of Jerusalem stood to the Jewish Church, the splendid temple and elaborate ritual, which appeared to all pious Hebrews the glory of their country and of the world. It would be little to say that faith in Christ as the Messiah of Israel had in no way separated the Christians from the national religion. More correct is it to say that hope for the future of Judaism and of Israel shone with promise in the company of the disciples of Jesus. To them

the ancient religion appeared on the point of renewal. Not one jot or tittle was to pass from the law: all was to be fulfilled. Most of the apostles came from Galilee, with a veneration for the holy city and the temple which had not as yet suffered disenchantment. They were full of the thought that their Master, the promised Messenger of the Covenant, was to purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, that they might offer unto Jehovah an offering in righteousness (Mal. iii. 3). Jesus was Head, not only of the Church, but also of the nation. He was of the royal family, a Prince of the line of David. When His claims were known and acknowledged, the tribes of God would pass through a new birth, and accomplish their destiny as the spiritual aristocracy of the world.

The practice of the apostles was in harmony with these views. By regular attendance in the temple, they sought, as far as possible, to associate their faith with the old devotion. At the close of the Gospel of St. Luke, it is recorded of the apostles, that after the ascension of Christ "they worshipped Him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy, and were continually in the temple, praising and blessing God." In the Book of Acts (ch. ii. 46) it is stated that day by day they continued stedfastly with one accord in the

temple, and breaking bread at home. The third chapter begins, "Now Peter and John were going up into the temple at the hour of prayer, being the ninth hour"; and there follows an account of the cure of the lame man, and Peter's address to the crowd in Solomon's porch. Events that took place some twenty-seven years later, on Paul's return from his third missionary journey (Acts xxi.), show that the Christians of Judæa still observed the Mosaic rites, and were as devoted as ever to the temple and its worship. And so they continued to be till the destruction of Jerusalem. The Christians had their own meeting-place, their own organization; their numbers increased by thousands at a time. And it is significant that a great company of the priests became obedient to the faith. Not only did the Christians endeavour to keep in touch with Judaism, but, for good or evil, they succeeded. Even the persecutions by the Sadducees did not alienate them; and the time came when those persecutions ceased, and the leader of the Church in Jerusalem was honoured as highly as if he had belonged to the priestly caste.

The parallel readily occurs which is to be found in the beginning of Methodism. The Church of England, venerated by John Wesley and his associates as the true Church of God and

mother of souls, corresponds to the Jewish Church, with its ancient traditions, its sacerdotalism and prestige. The authorities of the national Church, the priests and the Sanhedrin, were recognised by the apostles much in the same way, and with almost the same reservations, as the authorities of the Church of England were by Wesley. The Christian Church began as a society within the Jewish Church, endeavouring to bring about the fulfilment of its mission through the rule of the Messiah; and in a somewhat similar way Methodism began, as a society within the Church of England, endeavouring to purify that institution and bring about the accomplishment of its spiritual mission. No break with the old system was, at the outset, contemplated in either case. And the parallel holds in respect of the persecution which the early Methodists, like the early Christians, had to undergo. By both alike the virulent opposition of some in the churches they loved was regarded as an error of ignorance, which must in due course be repented of and disallowed.

Now these facts in the history of early Christianity had a most important influence on its development, and could not fail to leave their impress upon it, just as the parallel facts left their mark on Methodism. To some extent,



indeed, Christ had intended His followers to profit by it. On the moral side the law was to survive. Our Lord did not disturb those foundations of faith which had been laid long before in the history and legislation of the Hebrew people: He built on them, and desired His people to build on them. He claimed the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as His Father, whose kingdom He came to reveal. In many ways the attachment of the Christians to the old faith and worship was profitable and necessary.

Yet, on the other hand, it may be a question whether the apostles realised, as Christ meant them to realise, the clear division He had made between the Old Covenant and the New. And it is certain they took in far too literal a way His parabolic words regarding the future headship of the Twelve over the tribes of Israel. It was well that believers in Christ should be devout after the ancient manner; but not so well they should cling fast to the ancient ritual, as if the Jewish priesthood still retained its commission, and its mediation were still needful to the acceptable worship of God. Instituting the Sacrament of the Supper, our Lord had used the words: "This cup is the New Covenant in My blood." The law and the prophets, He said, had prophesied until John. Of the destruc-

tion of the temple He spoke without regret ; and although He never declared the priesthood to be useless, He constantly taught that the essence of religion was quite apart from priestly sacrifice and intercession. To Himself He applied the oracle of Psalm cxviii. : "The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner." The significance of these and many other deliverances of Christ was not at first understood. As it came to be perceived, the task that presented itself to the leaders of the Christian Church was one of great difficulty.

The difficulty lay in this, for one thing, that the whole system of Judaism seemed to go together—the moral law of the ten commandments, the law of feasts and sacrifices which gave the priesthood its authority, and the oral or traditional law handed down and expounded by the rabbis. How far was this sacred legislation to be preserved, how far renounced ? Were Christians to keep the Passover, the Feast of Pentecost, the ceremonies of the great Day of Atonement, the purifications, the rules concerning clean and unclean foods ? Were they to attend or not attend upon the synagogue worship ? How far duty lay on this side or that, not one of the apostles could say. No clear instruction had been given by Christ, and there

was no policy. But the conservative instinct was strong; and on the whole the feeling was to make no separation, to go on recognising the customs and sacred ordinances of the Jewish Church.

Another difficulty of the new beginning was connected with the use and authority of Scripture. The apostles were anxious to prove to themselves and to their fellow-countrymen, that in every particular the life and work of Jesus agreed with the ancient oracles. Each discovery in the books of Moses, in the Psalms, in the Prophets, of a Messianic prediction which had been fulfilled in the course of Christ's ministry and suffering, attached Christianity more closely to the letter of the Old Testament. Still it might seem that the teaching of Christ was opposed to that of Moses, and the Christians had at first no dialectician among them who could decide the relation between ancient scripture and new revelation. Neither the written word, nor any part of the venerable tradition, a national heritage of high authority, could easily be relegated to a secondary place, and have value thenceforth only in relation to recent ideas and events. The Christians were not called to change their faith; but they were to be agents in a religious evolution, and it was hard to

realise the duty. Not perhaps till near the close of the apostolic period did they perceive that the New Testament of their Lord and Saviour, growing in their hands by the production of Gospel and Epistle, was to be the final directory of faith and religion, the Bible of the new age.

Now, this being the state of things, there was clearly no little danger that the new elements of faith and hope given by Christ—all the distinctive ideas of Christianity, in short—would at first be advanced so timorously as to produce slight impression, and that they would gradually fall into shadow as time passed, and no visible second coming of the Lord fulfilled the trust of the Church. And here we see the extraordinary importance of the events of the day of Pentecost. The Christians had been meeting daily for prayer, in the belief that power would be given them from on high. This, to begin with, was the confidence which kept them together, and made a warm glow of feeling, that gradually increased to keen desire and enthusiastic hope. The gathering in the upper chamber grew larger every day. The addresses of the apostles, who were already going back with deep conviction upon their memories of Christ—the marvellous fact of the resurrection—the extraordinary departure of Christ from the world—

the new spirit of earnest prayer—made the time one of fervour and excitement. Then came that effusion of the Spirit, that unparalleled demonstration of the reality of faith, its power in the soul and in the world, which gave Christianity the force and copiousness of a new fountain springing from inexhaustible reservoirs.

The day which brought to the Christian Church its baptism of fire, was that of the Jewish Pentecostal festival. It has been said that this harvest celebration was a fit time to be “the feast of ingathering for the nations, when the Church, the mystical body of Christ, was presented unto God to be an instrument of His glory and a blessing to the world.” Scarcely in this way can the Old and New Covenants be brought together. The festival of the ancient Church now passed into the background; the new manifestation of Divine grace was to bring joy of a kind to which there was scarcely a parallel in Israel’s history. After fifteen eventful centuries, the giving of the law was to have its complement in the gift of the Spirit, the liberty and elation of consecrated lives. And suddenly and mightily the preternatural energy came. A rushing wind, strange tongue-like flames that burned and flashed above the heads of the crowd,

symbolised the new Divine power and courage that grew in each soul, and knit the believers together as one man. Then broke forth the ecstatic utterances, the fearless witness-bearing to Christ, His Messiahship, His glory, which from the place of meeting overflowed into the street. No inheritance from Israel's past could account for this. Peter was able to quote words from the Prophet Joel predictive of what had taken place; and those words had a singularly oracular tone, for they spoke of the pouring out of the Spirit or Breath of God upon all flesh, of the sons and daughters prophesying, the young men seeing visions, the old men dreaming dreams. Yet again, it was not with dreams and visions the newly-anointed prophets dealt. It was of fact they spoke; of knowledge and hope they were conscious of possessing. Joel's prophecy was at once verified and transcended in the experience of the Church.

Here, then, was the spiritual force Christianity needed to carry it forward on its career. It might continue partly subordinate to Judaism, might partly oppose Judaism. There might be a long period of conflict and probation before the new faith should be fully disentangled from restraining conditions. But the ardour of an irrepressible life had been imparted; and we

trace the evolution and manifestation of that life in its first springtime of impulse, so exuberant, so intense and heavenly, that something like a reformation of Judaism seemed to be at hand. The gift of tongues, moreover, pointed to an enterprise and success beyond the range of the Old Covenant. There was to be no one sacred speech. Men of all nations were to hear in their own languages the mighty works of God.

By the tidings of what had occurred among the Nazarenes a crowd was rapidly drawn together, and Peter was quick to use the opportunity of witness-bearing. His address dwelt on the Joel prophecy, on a prediction of the resurrection found in the sixteenth psalm, and its fulfilment in Jesus of Nazareth. The preacher called for repentance, and invited all to be baptized in the name of Jesus, the Christ, for the remission of sins. He promised that those who believed should have the gift of the Holy Spirit. The result was far beyond expectation. That day three thousand were added to the Church. The heavenly afflatus passed rapidly from soul to soul. Human testimony alone could not have wrought such conviction. A power was abroad constraining men to believe. This was surely the dawn of the great day of the Lord.

The Church now felt itself to be launched on its career. But the accession of large numbers brought a burden. Many who received baptism must have been very ignorant of the facts of Christ's life, and only half persuaded of His Messiahship. Men do not pass at a bound from disbelief or indifference to full knowledge and faith. Then the administration must have been greatly strained. Within a short time opportunities of meeting would have to be provided, so that all the converts might receive instruction. There had also to be some understanding in regard to the worship, the teaching, the observances needful to insure unity. To these matters the energy of the Church had to be addressed. For the edification of the new converts, "the fellowship of the apostles" was the security. It seems to be implied that one or other of the Twelve took charge of each meeting, and gave the instruction (*didache*), which had already received a certain form. There was also "breaking of bread" in some sacramental way, as the pledge of faith, the symbol of brotherhood. The narrative does not imply that there was a complete celebration of the Lord's Supper at each meeting. It points to a simple ordinance, perhaps an *agape* or love-feast, private and distinctively Christian, side by



side with the prayers and rites of the temple still publicly observed. By these means the administration of the Church kept pace, as far as possible, with its increase. And otherwise, apart from any definite rule, the spirit of the converts approved itself. They assumed duties toward each other which sprang from the sense of unity and the obligation of Christian love. Those who were rich sold their possessions, that they might be able to relieve the wants of their poorer brethren. A virtual community of goods was established. Gladness and praise were the marks of the new Israel.

So far without hindrance the spiritual life of the Christian society expressed itself, took form, gained certainty in movement, and expansive force. But very soon the Pentecostal impulse had to meet an obstacle which Christ foresaw, for which, also, His own experience had prepared His followers. The Christians may not have expected the authorities of the ancient religion to prevent their proclamation of Jesus as the Messiah. They had no desire to change the laws and customs of the nation. They imagined that everything might go on as before, with this difference only, that the ministry of the priests, the teaching of the rabbis, the government of the Sanhedrin, should now have regard to the

fact that the Messiah had come, and to the ideas that Jesus had added to the old system of belief. Peter, fully persuaded in his own mind, encouraged by the extraordinary success of his first address to the people, may have supposed that with equal demonstration of the Spirit and convincing power an appeal might be made to the Sanhedrin itself. And there were reasons, of which he was perhaps aware, for taking this sanguine view. The leading Pharisees had apparently come to see that the crucifixion of our Lord was a blunder, if not a crime. Their inveterate feud with the Sadducees disposed them to regard the Christian belief with favour, for the resurrection was a distinct support to their side of the controversy. The Sanhedrin, too, might well fear to commit itself to another dangerous experiment, in the way of rousing the populace and coercing the Roman governor. Altogether the outlook was hopeful; and the apostles may have scarcely dreamed of serious opposition.

There did, however, come a succession of hindrances and trials; and the Church had need of the spiritual faith and zeal received on the day of Pentecost. When Peter and John first declared openly in the temple that Jesus was the Son of God, that His crucifixion was a fulfilment

of prophecy regarding the sufferings of the Messiah, that repentance and faith in Him were needful to salvation, and that He was to come again and bring the restoration of all things—the boldness of their testimony could not pass unnoticed. The priests, the captain of the temple-guard, and the Sadducees, laid hands on the two apostles, who were kept in custody till the next day, and then brought before the council. The quarrel does not require to be traced in detail. It was undertaken in a timid way by the Sanhedrin, and neither daunted the spirit of the apostles, nor embarrassed the activity of the Christians. Fearlessly, even to the council itself, Peter reaffirmed his faith in the crucified Jesus as the Messiah, and the Saviour of Israel. The gathering of the Church to which he and John afterwards related their experience, was marked by a renewal of the spiritual ardour and extraordinary signs of the day of Pentecost. The enthusiasm of the Christians, now numbering some five thousand, rose higher than ever. “With great power gave the apostles their witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus”: the transcendent fact was stamped effectually upon the consciousness of Jerusalem and of the world.

The second attempt made by the Sadducees to suppress the rising faith was thwarted by

Gamaliel. The third, however, resulted in the death of Stephen, who had used language that appeared sacrilegious; and the narrative of St. Luke states that "there arose a great persecution against the Church which was at Jerusalem, and they were scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judæa and Samaria, except the apostles" (Acts viii. 1). Next, after some years, Herod became the aggressor, in order to please the Jews. The stroke fell on James the brother of John; and it almost fell on Peter. Thus began the fellowship of suffering which was for many centuries to bind the faithful together and unite them closely to their Lord. But the period now reviewed, and even the first three decades of the Church in Jerusalem, cannot be described as a time of serious persecution. The Roman rule was at first favourable to Christianity, and the violence of Jewish opposition was kept in check by those tokens of pious devotion to the law and the temple in which the Christians did not fail.

Meanwhile, within the Church, sources of danger were not altogether wanting. Its rapid growth was, humanly speaking, incompatible with purity. So popular a movement was likely to draw into it persons who saw the opportunity of gratifying their ambition, and earning regard otherwise beyond their reach. The case of

Ananias and Sapphira was of this kind; and we may say that primitive Christianity was in far greater peril from the hypocrisy of persons like these, than from the opposition of the Sanhedrin and of Herod. Again, however, the tide of spiritual power and moral earnestness swept over the barrier. The offenders were convicted of a sin so heinous, that exposure and condemnation carried the sentence of death. No sword of human justice was unsheathed: the guilty pair died by the visitation of God.

The narrative of the Acts passes rapidly from point to point without note of time. We know, however, that the death of Herod Agrippa, mentioned in ch. xii., took place A.D. 44. The first twelve chapters, therefore, cover about eleven or twelve years. During this period, besides progress in the organisation of the Church, there had been other important gains. Faith in the power and grace of the Holy Spirit had been assured. During our Lord's life the disciples were entirely dependent on His personal presence and living word. They entered a higher range of the religious life when the Spirit bore witness with their spirits of the things of God, and His Divine monition and support could be everywhere enjoyed. Along with ecstatic utterance ascribing praise to Christ, the power from

on high was found to mean calm wisdom for ordering affairs, light on every matter of faith and duty. It was no temporary gift the ascended Saviour had bestowed. The Church was permanently endowed with spiritual strength and zeal. The Holy Ghost was the heat of each personal life, a unifying force in the body of believers. Under changing conditions the Spirit did not fail the trustful; there were new needs, new forms of effort, the same unworldly ardour, power, and hope.

A clearer view of the scope of Christianity had also come. When Stephen was arraigned, the terms of the charge made against him may not have been founded on his teaching; yet the accusation, "We have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth shall destroy this place (the temple), and shall change the customs which Moses delivered us," is so far borne out by his own words. He was bolder than most Christians of the time, and showed singular spirituality of faith when he said, "The Most High dwelleth not in temples made with hands." To the narrow Jewish mind the language appeared blasphemous, and Stephen was hurried to death. But his brave testimony enlarged the Christian horizon. Philip, another of the seven deacons, several of whom became helpers of the apostles

in the work of teaching, followed the lead of Stephen, and first ventured to extend the Church beyond Hebrew boundaries. Proselytes of Gentile birth had already been received; Philip preached to Samaritans, and did not scruple to baptize those who professed faith in Christ. One of his converts, indeed—Simon, a notorious sorcerer—proved so base a hypocrite, that Samaritan Christianity might well have fallen into discredit. Yet the sincerity of the rest seemed to be fully shown by their receiving the gift of the Holy Ghost. And Philip, having crossed the first dividing wall, was led soon afterwards beyond another. “A man of Ethiopia, a eunuch of great authority under Candace, queen of the Ethiopians,” a believer in the Jewish religion, but no proselyte, received the gospel with ready faith. Philip baptized him into the name of Jesus, and he went on his way rejoicing.

These were cases of some importance, yet by no means decisive as precedents. The vision of Peter, however, which taught him to call no man “common or unclean,” and the baptism at Cæsarea of the Roman centurion Cornelius, were authoritative. If the other apostles and the Church in Jerusalem had courage and generosity enough, the way was open for them to carry the gospel to the Gentiles around and to the world.

But Judæan Christianity held back, and Antioch on the Orontes became the first metropolis of the wider faith. There, at no great distance from Jerusalem, religion was at once more free and more earnestly aggressive. The Christian Jews who went to that city from Palestine, preached the gospel at first to their countrymen and to the Grecian Jews. Not till later was the heathen population in Antioch evangelised ; and the adoption of the name *Christians* then seems to have implied the need of a common designation for those who were of one faith, yet differed from both Jews and heathens. At all events, the religion of Christ passed there into its larger life ; for in vile, beautiful Antioch no other faith had any vitality or force. Judaism lagged behind. The gospel advanced to try issues with the superstition and idolatry of the world.



## CHAPTER III.

### THE PROGRESS OF DOCTRINE.

THE progress of Christian doctrine will now engage our attention. We shall look into the earliest discourses recorded in the Acts and the Epistle of James, where belief appears in a transitional form. In these we shall trace the growth of that broad and spiritual gospel which at length became the message of the Church. And we shall find that the doctrine came slowly into clearness, and took shape under the influence of those Jewish observances it was intended to supersede. The singular fact will present itself, that the ancient religion—narrow, national, ceremonial—supplied a symbolism by which Christianity set forth broad spiritual ideas for the enlightenment of the world.

All the Gospels, including that of St. John, show how persistently the apostles of our Lord clung to the half-political conception of His

mission. Almost the last question they addressed to Him was, "Lord, dost Thou at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" No doubt they thought of a kingdom in which He should rule and dispense His grace, so as to make Israel the nucleus of a world-wide federation, the centre of a universal worship of God. Yet their hope was, to a great extent, on the earthly plane. The Messiah was to be a veritable king. He was to ordain and establish holiness, somewhat in the manner of a despot. He was to compel obedience and flash divine lightnings of indignation against the rebellious. But the spiritual idea of the work of Christ was in conflict with this crude belief. And the inquiry how the pure and generous view prevailed over the other is needful to a right apprehension of Christianity, not only as it was first preached, but also as it is in essence—a religion for all time and for the whole of mankind.

During the period covered by our last chapter there was little opportunity for quiet thought. Still, a few must have been engaged in trying to understand the relation of Christ's death to the Jewish law and its sacrifices, and to determine the new position of Israelites. As there was a complete system of belief under the Old Covenant, so, it was felt, there must be a system of belief

under the New. While at first the Messiahship of Jesus might be accepted on the ground of His resurrection and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, believers would soon inquire what the new faith was to do for them individually. As the sayings and parables of Christ were recalled, and the earliest gospel took shape, this inquiry must have become more pressing. Innumerable points in the teaching of Jesus turned on personal duty and salvation. "The Way" was seen to be one for each life, not for the Hebrews as a people only, nor for any mass of men seeking political power or liberty. And the influence of this under-current of thought is to be traced in the earlier discourses, in which, although they are mainly oratorical, doctrines or germs of doctrines come gradually to expression, the first-fruits of Christian remembrance and inspiration.

We commence with the idea of *salvation*. The name Saviour is twice given to our Lord in the Gospels. Once it occurs in St. Luke, in the annunciation of Christ's birth to the shepherds: "There is born to you this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord." Again, in the Gospel according to St. John, the name occurs as given to Christ, not by the apostles in acknowledgment of His Divine power to forgive and redeem, but by the men of Samaria, who

certainly had very crude ideas of the meaning of the word. The second of these occasions may be left out of account. But as soon as thought began to go back on the revelation of the new order, the angel's annunciation must have rung with new force. Turning to the Acts of the Apostles, then, we find the name Saviour given to Christ (ch. v. 31) by Peter in an address to the Sanhedrin: "Him did God exalt with His right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour." Previously the forms of teaching were—that God had made Jesus "both Lord and Christ"; that God had "glorified His Servant Jesus"; that Jesus was "the Holy and Righteous One," "the Prince of Life"; that every soul which did not hearken to Him should be "utterly destroyed from among the people"; that He had been sent by God to bless the Jewish people "in turning away every one of them from their iniquities." Speaking to the Sanhedrin, also, on a previous occasion, Peter said: "In none other is there salvation: for neither is there any other name under heaven, that is given among men, wherein we must be saved." Thus advance was made to the idea that Jesus Christ is personally a Saviour, not merely the means of deliverance, but one endowed with the saving energy, as the words in Acts v. 31 imply.

Stephen died with the prayer on his lips, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." The vision which sustained him was that of a Divine Friend waiting to welcome him home. To Cornelius and his household Peter testified that the risen and exalted Jesus was "ordained of God to be the Judge of quick and dead," and that "through His name every one that believeth on Him shall receive remission of sins." Almost in the same terms, St. Paul, preaching in the synagogue at Antioch of Pisidia, described the salvation of Christ, adding, however, these words, which already showed the direction of his thought: "By Him every one that believeth is justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses." And it is in this address that the name Saviour occurs in Acts for the second time: "Of this man's seed hath God, according to promise, brought unto Israel a Saviour, Jesus."

Now it cannot be denied that the use of so distinctive a name—that is to say, the doctrine that Jesus Christ is a Saviour—implies a spiritual conception of His work. The step in thought was of great significance. It meant recognition of the power of Christ to enlighten and liberate the soul. Yet, at the same time, it is noticeable that, just as in the angel's annunciation reported

by St. Luke, so also in Peter's address to the Sanhedrin and Paul's at Antioch, Jesus is represented as Saviour of Israel. Christ is exalted, Peter said, "to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel and remission of sins" (Acts v. 31); and Paul declares that God "hath brought unto Israel a Saviour, Jesus" (Acts xiii. 23). There is growing spirituality; yet the salvation of Christ is primarily for the Hebrews as a people. At first it appeared a strange thing when any outside the chosen race, whether Samaritans, Romans, or Greeks, entered into new life by believing in Christ. To Peter and his brethren such occasions seemed exceptional. St. Paul was the first who came to see that there was nothing either strange or exceptional, because Christ is the Saviour of all men.

The next doctrine we consider is that of *forgiveness*, or the remission of sins. The Gospel of St. Luke records that in our Lord's last conversation with the disciples He said: "Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer, and rise again from the dead the third day; and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name unto all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem." With these words before him, St. Luke proceeded to write the Book of Acts. What then do we find in the addresses

recorded there? That of Peter on the day of Pentecost was clearly intended to convict his hearers of the guilt of Christ's death: "Him, being delivered up by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye by the hand of lawless men did crucify and slay." It was according to the purpose of God that Christ should suffer. They would have had no power against Him otherwise. But in rejecting Christ, in demanding His blood, in persecuting Him to death, the people of Jerusalem had been guilty of a sin so great that all others were insignificant beside it. It was the unique transgression, summing up in itself all iniquity and rebellion. Peter speaks of no other sin, thinks of no other. He requires Israel to repent of that. And he has an assurance to give which invites repentance. The sin does not remain as a load that must crush the nation. God has raised up Him whom they slew. Jesus is by the right hand of God exalted, He has obtained the promise of the Holy Spirit, and by Him the Spirit has been poured forth. There is therefore a way of forgiveness, and Peter can offer to all who repent of the sin of rejecting Christ full remission in His name.

Pass now to the occasion when the same apostle spoke, in the porch of the temple, after the cure of the lame man. Again the great sin

of Israel was the theme. Admission was made that the crime was one of ignorance, and that the sufferings of Christ were fore-ordained and predicted. Yet Peter does not lessen his words of condemnation. "Whom ye delivered up and denied before the face of Pilate . . . Ye denied the Holy and Righteous One, and asked for a murderer to be granted unto you, and killed the Prince of Life." And again, the resurrection of Christ is declared to have opened a way of remission. The power of the exalted Christ has been invoked, and by faith made visible in the cure of the lame man. And the conclusion is: "Repent ye therefore, and turn again, that your sins may be blotted out." If they will only do so, a new day shall dawn for Israel. The nation shall have times of refreshing, and then the Christ will come in fulness of power and glory. At the close of the address there is a clear reminiscence of the words of our Lord regarding remission to all nations, for Peter ends thus: "Unto you *first* God, having raised up His Servant, sent Him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from your iniquities." Already the light of the greater gospel has dawned.

Yet once more, before the Sanhedrin, Peter spoke on this subject; and the passage is con-



clusive in regard to the first form of the doctrine of remission. Before Sadducees who denied the resurrection, and the council which had sentenced our Lord, these bold words were spoken: "The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom ye slew, hanging Him on a tree. Him did God exalt with His right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance unto Israel, and remission of sins. And we are witnesses of these things, and so is the Holy Ghost whom God hath given to them that obey Him." The sin is condemned once more, and remission is connected not with the death, but with the resurrection and exaltation of Christ. It is the Messiah raised up by God's right hand who gives remission. He is on high to offer grace, to proclaim pardon; for He desires to save Israel.

Now it has been asked why the apostles did not connect the forgiveness of sin with Christ's atoning death—why they did not declare, from the first, that He had died as a sacrifice, that His death was the true oblation fulfilling the types of the Old Testament, and providing for the remission of all sin? And the answers given are diverse. Dr. Young, author of *The Christ of History*, in his book, *The Life and Light of Men*,<sup>1</sup> maintains that, according to the belief

<sup>1</sup> Page 354.

and teaching of the apostles, "the holy work entrusted to the Redeemer was not to appease God's anger, but to be the highest utterance of God's love—not to satisfy God's justice, but to be God's messenger to bless mankind—not to make expiation for sin, but to turn men away from sin, to fill their hearts with abhorrence of it." He says that during the ten or twelve years which succeeded the death of Jesus, so far as the materials of information go, "there is not a word or hint of sacrificial expiatory sufferings, of pardon from God procured by these, or of imputation or satisfaction. . . . Almost the sole subject of apostolic teaching," he says, "was Christ, the Messiah of God, but rejected and crucified by men—Christ the hope of Israel and of the world—Christ in whose name was preached to all men the forgiveness of sins."<sup>1</sup>

Criticising Dr. Young's opinion, Dr. Dale affirms that if the apostles had proclaimed the expiatory power of the sacrifice of Christ to those who had been guilty of His death, the teaching "would have been worse than useless."<sup>2</sup> One thing only had they to insist upon, he says, that in crucifying Christ the Jewish people had committed an appalling crime. "To have ex-

<sup>1</sup> *The Life and Light of Men*, p. 357.

<sup>2</sup> *The Atonement*, p. 113.

plained that the death of Christ was a propitiation for the sins of the world would have perplexed the minds of those to whom he (St. Peter) was speaking, and broken the force of those terrible denunciations by which he endeavoured to awaken their consciences and alarm their fears." Dr. Dale's opinion is that the apostles were aware that our Lord died to make propitiation for the sins of the world; but he thinks such a doctrine could not have been safely made known to those who had been guilty of the death of Christ or had condoned it.

Now this is a doubtful and dangerous position. To say nothing of what might well be called *suppressio veri*, if the language of Peter is regarded, much will be found that went to relieve the conscience of the Jew. Admission is made that the crime was committed in ignorance. The fact is insisted upon that Christ had suffered by the determinate counsel of God (Acts ii. 23, iii. 18). The suffering of Christ is shown to have been a fulfilment of prophecy; and the attempt to extinguish His life has only prepared the way for His exaltation and glory. Moreover, as the ascended Messiah, He is ready and able to forgive the sin of Israel. Clearly the preacher did his utmost, even while he brought home the guilt

of Christ's rejection, to prove that the state of Israel was not irremediable.

The explanation of the language used by St. Peter is that the apostles had not before their minds the doctrine of Christ's sacrificial atoning death. As yet they did not realise that His death, the great offering for sin, superseded the sacrifices of the Old Covenant, and that He had given Himself for the sins of the world. Weiss says that at Acts iii. 18 *f.*, "there lies plainly enough for the consciousness of the speaker the presupposition that through the fulfilment of the prophecy concerning the suffering of the Messiah, God had done His part to provide for the people the Messianic forgiveness of sins."<sup>1</sup> This must be admitted. Yet fulfilment of the prophecy of Isaiah liii., which was before the mind of Peter, did not imply the complete doctrine of a sacrifice for all sin, which was an entirely new idea to the Jewish mind. The apostles were, at this stage, only gathering their recollections of Christ's teaching, and comparing statement with statement. They were far from the definite doctrine of the Epistle to the Hebrews: "If the blood of goats and bulls, and the ashes of a heifer sprinkling them that have been defiled, sanctify unto the cleanness of the flesh: how much more shall the

<sup>1</sup> *Biblical Theology*, English Trans. p. 177.

blood of Christ, who through the eternal covenant offered Himself without blemish unto God, cleanse your consciences from dead works to serve the living God ? ”

Meanwhile the teaching of Peter, Stephen, and Philip did its work in preparing for the fulness of the gospel. They declared that there was no name but that of Jesus of Nazareth by which Israel could be saved. They attached faith, remission, and hope to the grace and power of Him who had been led to death and raised to the right hand of God. They convicted men of the sin of Christ's death, and shook the conscience of Israel. They opened the way to pardon and higher life, by declaring Christ to be the Saviour. For Israel first, and by and by for a broader circle, the hope of salvation was unfolded.

The notion of inspiration held by some would imply that the apostles, being divinely enlightened, were able, from the day the Holy Spirit came on them, to see all there was to see, and state Christian truth perfectly. The advance in doctrinal statement is supposed to mean that they adapted their instruction to the persons they addressed, and gave more as men were able to receive it. This view of inspiration is altogether inadmissible. When our Lord promised the Holy Spirit to

guide His followers into all truth, He clearly meant that the guidance was to be continuous and progressive. The Spirit was to lead the minds of believers to point after point, from which wider views of truth should be obtained. St. Peter did not see at first that Gentiles were to be free to enter the kingdom of God without passing through the gate of Judaism. The vision of the net or sheet let down from heaven with clean and unclean animals had to show him this broader doctrine of the new dispensation. Nevertheless he was an inspired man before he had the vision. It was in Christian theology as it has been in natural science—truths came to light gradually; and some devout inspired men, who had minds open to the light of God, passed away without making the great discoveries that seemed to lie plain before them. But doctrines which were discovered late were none the less true on that account.

Among the writings of the New Testament the Epistle of James is of peculiar interest, from the point of view we are now taking. It is quite evident that about A.D. 50, when Paul and Barnabas returned from their first missionary journey, James had been led to approve of their ministry among the Gentiles. He showed no desire to confine the hopes of the gospel to those

who kept the law of Moses. Expressions used by St. Paul in his Epistle to the Galatians (ii. 7 *ff.*) imply that the narrower interpretation of Christianity had still some hold of the mind of James as well as of St. Peter and St. John ; and certain persons who professed to be under the instructions of James interfered with the liberty of the converts at Antioch. But James was the mouthpiece of the council which decided that heathens who believed were to be admitted without circumcision to the privileges of the Christian Church. Summing up, he quoted from Amos (ch. ix. 11, 12) a prophecy which was so far explicit, and the terms of the finding were that the Gentiles who turned to God should not be troubled with the observances of Judaism, but should be required simply "to abstain from the pollutions of idols, and from fornication, and from what is strangled, and from blood." A divine work was going on which might enlarge greatly the boundaries of the Church. James agreed with the apostles and the Judæan Church generally, that no difficulty should be placed in the way ; and Paul and Barnabas were satisfied with the mandate they received.

Nevertheless traditional belief continued to influence the Christianity of James. He still held that the Hebrew people were to be first in

the new kingdom of which Jesus was Messianic Head. This is to be gathered from the epistle which bears his name, and has every mark of genuineness. Weiss is of opinion that the writing belongs to the time "prior to Paul,"<sup>1</sup> by which is to be understood the time previous to any of the epistles of St. Paul. This can scarcely be maintained, though Dr. Salmon has argued very fully for a date so early that James could properly address all Christians as under the obligations of the Mosaic law.<sup>2</sup> The epistle shows, at all events, the nature of Christian belief as it first prevailed in the Church at Jerusalem. Whether we take it to have been written before A.D. 50, or suppose James ten years after that date to have still adhered to his first conception of Christianity, we must agree with Godet that, "as Peter personifies in himself the normal transition from the Jewish economy into the free grace of Christianity, James represents the transition into that transition."<sup>3</sup>

The epistle is addressed "to the twelve tribes which are of the Dispersion." The writer has Jewish Christians in view, along with other

<sup>1</sup> *Biblical Theology of the New Testament*, p. 170.

<sup>2</sup> *Historical Introduction to the Books of the New Testament*, p. 45.

<sup>3</sup> *Biblical Studies, New Testament*, p. 218.



Hebrews who have travelled beyond the mother-country, probably for the purpose of carrying on their business. And the Christian faith of James is in harmony with his patriotic hope as a Jew, for he does not write to any believers in Jesus who are outside the Hebrew Church. He speaks of Jesus as Lord and Christ. He names Him "the Lord of Glory," thereby implying the belief that Christ has been exalted to heaven. He tells the poor to be patient "until the coming of the Lord"; that is to say, he looks for the second advent of Christ to take place soon. And with that he expects a readjustment of all things. It is as Judge the Lord will come (ch. v. 9); and when He returns to the earth He will put an end to oppression, and relieve those who have patiently suffered. One reference he appears to make to the death of Christ, and it is of a singular kind. He charges the rich with that crime: "Ye have condemned, ye have killed the Righteous *One*; he doth not resist you" (ch. v. 6). It has become clear to him that worldly position and the desire to maintain it had much to do with the rejection of Christ. A poor despised Messiah had not been to the liking of the proud wealthy class. This would seem to be the meaning of the passage, though it is capable of another interpretation.

James is said to have been a man of ascetic piety, a Nazirite who lived in the plainest way, and occupied himself greatly with acts of devotion. His Christianity is in the temper and spirit of the Nazirite vow. Apart from the doctrinal hints just indicated, and a few others, his epistle deals with matters of morality. Yet there is no legalism: he writes in a strain of liberty caught from the revelation of the spiritual life. At times his style is proverbial; but generally he has the manner of an Old Testament prophet, and the illustrations he employs are from the Hebrew Scriptures. To show the importance of prayer, he adduces the example of Elijah, not the command of Christ. He commends endurance, not by a reference to the cross, but by recalling the patience of Job. Speaking of faith, he goes back to the cases of Abraham and of Rahab. There is no reference to the death of Christ for sin, nor to forgiveness as bestowed by Him.

At two points James speaks of salvation. "Putting away all filthiness and overflowing of wickedness, receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls" (ch. i. 21). Here the "implanted word" is the "word of truth" previously mentioned; and in this obscure way he seems to refer to the gospel of

the Messiahship of Jesus. There is a danger, he knows, that the statement of this gospel may kindle wrath; and that he greatly deprecates (ch. i. 19, 20). But a meek reception of this "word," leading to reverence for the meek and gracious One who is the true Messiah, will bring spiritual life. The followers of the Lord Jesus Christ have new power to endure, a great and heavenly hope. They are "a kind of first-fruits" of the creatures of God. Again, at ch. ii. 14, he asks: "What doth it profit, my brethren, if a man say he hath faith, but have not works? Can that faith save him?" The works he speaks of here are not those of the ceremonial law. The "word of truth" has shown him that beneficence, peaceableness, self-restraint, humility, purity, patience, are the true works of God. And these there must be, if a life is to have approval and salvation. To recite the articles of a creed in the Oriental fashion—to say, for instance, "I believe that God is One"—is no justification of a life. That may be called faith; but a deeper and more energetic principle of Godward feeling must be shown.

Such, then, is the Christianity of James. There is no sort of antagonism to Moses and the law. Yet his religion is not Mosaism, nor legalism. It is not that "righteousness which is

of the law," rejected by Paul. On the other hand, it is not the free spiritual religion which Christianity became when separation had been made between Judaism and the Gospel. For James, and those in circumstances similar to his, "The Way" provided life, freedom, hope, which Judaism alone could not give. The liberating element was recognition of Jesus as spiritual Head and Leader of Israel. When His mediation was received, even as a germinal idea, there was new birth. Life went out on a higher level, with new consciousness of God, new motives of duty: the journey now was along a path which led to heights unknown.

We know that the Hebrew Christians in Judæa remained for at least a century in the transitional stage of belief. Like all similar conditions, it was at once one of privilege and one of danger. If they had said, We have not yet attained, we must press on that we may apprehend that for which we have been apprehended by Christ Jesus,—in that case the gain would have been without alloy. But men are apt to imagine the good to be the best, and not only to content themselves with what they have, but to think all others should remain where they are. The apostles did not fall into this error, but many of the members of the Church did.

Hence arose the party of Judaizing Christians whom St. Paul often encountered. In Jerusalem itself there was no break with Judaism, until events proved the hopelessness of a creed which rested in any sense on the temple and its ceremonies. In the year A.D. 70, Jerusalem was destroyed, and the sacrifices of the Mosaic law, which could be offered in no other place, came to an end for ever. Before the final assault on the city, the Christians fled to Pella, a town of Decapolis, where the Church was reconstructed. Afterwards, when Jerusalem was rebuilt, with the name of *Ælia Capitolina*, they returned, having in the interval broken off their connection with Judaism. This division was hastened, about the year A.D. 135, by a persecution which the Christians of Palestine suffered at the hands of the Jews. So at length, in the third or fourth generation, Hebrew Christianity was driven into freedom.

It may seem strange that the "blindness of Israel" rested, in part even, on those who were of the election of grace. It is, however, still more wonderful that one who gloried in his Jewish birth, a Pharisee, a Hebrew of the Hebrews, should have led the way into the full liberty of Christ. We must refrain from judging that on the one side there was a want of cour-

ageous fidelity to Christ, on the other alone the true illumination of the Spirit. Each in his way—James who clung to the law, and Paul who, loving Israel with deep filial affection, broke from the bonds of the law—showed the fervent religious spirit which Judaism nourished and Christ brought to fruitfulness. In the heart of it the old Hebrew faith had a love and a light which make the Psalms and many parts of prophecy dear for ever to the Christian. Nor need we despair of an unveiling of the Hebrew mind, to be followed by its “turning to the Lord.”

Writing in 1885, Professor Cheyne quoted the saying of a devout Russian Jew: “Although I am still far from believing Jesus to be the Son of God, yet I consider Him my Mediator with God, and I often say in my prayers, ‘This for the sake of Jesus of Nazareth’”; and the quotation is followed by the remark that this confession and others of a like kind seem to promise a revival of primitive Judæo-Christianity. “Are we sure,” asks the professor, “that the Hellenised theology of the Church of the Councils” (the post-apostolic councils) “is not partly responsible for Jewish unbelief? . . . While the prejudices of Judaism are what they are, is not a Judæo-Christian Church a neces-

sity?"<sup>1</sup> Assuredly the Jew who finds difficulty in accepting our forms of thought and doctrine may, by his own path, reach the Light of the World. We have no doubt either of the Christianity or of the inspiration of St. James; and Hebrews now may be Christians like him. A contemporary movement among the Jews of New York, under the evangelist Hermann Warszawiak, seems to show that when the appropriate note is struck, Hebrew faith responds as in apostolic days. Yet the boldness of Paul is the true example. His ideas were not Hellenic; they were vividly original. The "hope of Israel" lies along his way; for now at least the vitality of the Hebrew race is rather of the present world than of the soul. A Judæo-Christian Church would have the light of promise only if the external and ceremonial gave place to the spiritual, and thought and feeling were penetrated by a new fervour of faith.

<sup>1</sup> *Expositor*, Third Series, vol. i. p. 411.

## CHAPTER IV.

### THE ENLARGEMENT OF CHRISTIANITY.

WE are now to consider how, in two ways, by geographical and by doctrinal expansion, Christianity entered on a new stage of its divine career. The beginnings of enlargement were made before Paul appeared on the scene—were indeed inherent in the gospel as a message of redemption and life. But decisive movement came through Paul's inspired boldness and vigour of mind. While the twelve apostles held back, he took possession, in Christ's name, of the whole world as the field, and claimed fulfilment of the prediction: "They shall come from the east and west, and from the north and south, and shall sit down in the kingdom of God."

The fragmentary accounts which Paul gives of himself enable us to follow the progress of his religious life, from that moment when, face to face with the Lord, he became a new creature,



bound to the faith he had persecuted, free from the bondage in which he had gloried. We are able also to go back on the time previous to his conversion, and make out partially what his life had been. And we are astonished, first, that he went over to Christianity; and again that, having become a Christian, his vehement temper and restless energy did not rend in pieces the timorous society into which he threw himself. At every step in his career we see the man constrained by the love of Christ—one who had been crucified with Christ, and lived because Christ lived in him. The marvel of his own change was always present to his consciousness, and gave him unbounded faith in the power of the gospel to reconcile to God those who were at the farthest point of enmity.

As one of the most important young disciples of the Pharisaic school, Saul of Tarsus must have been behind the scenes and known all that had been done by the Sanhedrin against the Christian faith. He must have had full information why the death of Christ was resolved upon, whether for the reason Caiaphas alleged, that one man must die for the people, or because Pharisaic methods and supremacy were found to be in extreme danger. This acquaintance with the state of affairs, which none of the other apostles

could have had, came to be of great service to him afterwards in considering the real meaning of our Lord's death. Even before his conversion, he had doubts of the saving power of the law; and as he stood by watching the martyrdom of Stephen, his faith in the old order must have been severely tried. But for the time he was held from conviction. The alternative was either to renounce Judaism, because it could be maintained only by merciless persecution, or to pledge himself anew to the policy of the council. To this latter course he felt himself shut up; and with new fervour he strove to remove from Israel the curse of schism. All the more, we may suppose, that his mind misgave him not a little, he became fanatical against the followers of "The Way," and outdid every one in severity and violence.

It was not long, however, till the truth broke on his mind. On the journey to Damascus he had time for reflection, and at the right moment the Lord met him in love. What he knew of the personality of Jesus of Nazareth was revived, and made the basis of a most touching and penetrating appeal: "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou Me?" The fetters of mind and soul were snapped by that momentary appearance of Christ as the true Messiah, the Fulfiller

of the destiny of Israel, the Light of the craving soul. Thereupon Saul left Pharisaism as a system and as a religious temper behind for ever. He saw in a flash what it was, a narrowing of religion, a reduction to absurdity of Judaism, an enemy of liberty and life. It took him years of thought to find the full gospel of Christianity. But no leader of the early Church could possibly see the errors and defects of legalism as he saw them. What they were and to what they led he knew by the keen experience of a mind uncompromisingly sincere; and therein lay his power as a dialectician. In the gloom of the blindness which fell on him he had first the consciousness of sin immeasurable, which remained as a haunting memory, and kept his great soul one of the lowliest. Then came forgiveness, the liberty of full remission, the gift of grace immeasurable; and when this was sealed by baptism, his education in Christianity began. Apart in Arabia, with such knowledge of Christ as he could acquire to found upon and provide a key to the ancient Scriptures, he sought the truth. And as he searched, it was communicated "by revelation of the Lord." There came to him in course of time a clear and strenuous realisation of the world-gospel.

It has been supposed that during the years

he was in Arabia, and those following which he spent at his home in Tarsus, Paul reached something like his full equipment as a teacher of Christianity. One is indeed apt to imagine that when in company with Barnabas he began his work as an evangelist at Antioch, the whole scheme of doctrine which appears in his greater epistles had already been settled. This view, however, cannot be held without partial disregard of the Book of Acts and of the earliest writings of Paul—the two letters to the Church in Thessalonica. It is beyond doubt that the germinal principle from which his doctrine sprang had been revealed to him at an early date. His experience of Pharisaism, and the thralldom in which mind and life had been held, prepared him to receive the truth that the law had no power to save. He was carried back beyond Moses to Abraham, and Abraham's justification by faith, an example to which he often recurred. But with this light to guide him, he had still far to go in order to find the full and balanced doctrine of salvation set forth in the Epistle to the Romans. He had a vision of truth which already placed him in front of those who were bound to Mosaic ceremonialism. Their conception of Christianity had not lifted them above the temple mount, to which they hoped all nations would yet gather

for the worship of God. But Paul had a kind of contempt for the system in which he had been educated: to him Christianity was something greater than any Hebrew vessel could contain. The task was before him of relating the whole of Christ's work as the Incarnate Son of God, and especially His death and resurrection, to the generous divine plan and to the needs of the human soul. And he had to advance carefully. For, though he turned from Jewish legalism, he could not turn from the revelations of the Old Testament. Not the most ardent of those who continued to observe the law of Moses had a firmer faith in the Scripture than his. The Jew was first in privilege: Paul had to make out what that privilege was. The Jew had the oracles of God: no word must be spoken that would gainsay or slight one of those oracles. Under such conditions the formulation of doctrine could not be rapid.

The first period of study—some seven or eight years, including fifteen momentous days with St. Peter at Jerusalem—was spent by Paul in such a way that the knowledge of the gospel he acquired must have been, as we say, theoretical. He seems to have had no opportunity of trying practically its influence on the minds of other men. And it is clear that when he reached the

close of this long period of studious retirement, he was by no means prepared to venture beyond the circle of believers in Judaism with his offer of salvation through Christ. He seems still to have assumed that a knowledge of the true God, such as Jews and proselytes to the Jewish religion alone possessed, was absolutely needful as a preliminary to the higher faith. He knew, indeed, that he was to be an apostle to the Gentiles. From the first this had taken firm hold of his mind. But how it was to be fulfilled did not yet appear. He began to preach, holding with the other apostles that, as a general rule, if not always, the Jewish belief must prepare for the Christian. Only, he would show the Jewish belief in its true light: he would speak of the covenant with Abraham rather than the legislation of Moses. Thus the Gentiles who received the gospel would easily see the wider life, the spiritual freedom, that lay beyond Hebraism. The law would be to the Gentiles a tutor bringing them to Christ (Gal. iii. 24), but would not require years to effect the introduction to the new teacher. It would simply guide them across a court which had been the prison of souls for centuries; then they would reach the gate leading forth into the broad spaces of spiritual life.

These would appear to have been the views of

Christianity in relation to the Old Testament, which Paul held when, about the year 44 A.D., he began his work as an evangelist. Our Lord's saying in regard to Zacchæus might have been taken by St. Paul as a text for his evangel: "To-day is salvation come to this house, forasmuch as he also is *a son of Abraham*." And the apostle was following with inspired logic the Master's own judgment of Pharisaism and the legal spirit, when he set them aside as of no avail for justification. The parable of the Pharisee and the Publican, one may say, was constantly in Paul's thought.

Shortly after the martyrdom of Stephen, a desire had arisen among the Jews of Syrian Antioch to hear more of Christ than those disciples could tell whom persecution had driven to their city. In response to their appeal to the Church in Jerusalem for an accredited teacher, Barnabas had been sent, and his work had been wonderfully successful. Many proselytes of earnest inquiring mind were worshippers in the synagogue, and in an atmosphere far more free than that of Judæa the new faith was widely accepted. "Much people was added unto the Lord." The work by and by exceeded the ability of Barnabas; and, casting about for a helper, he bethought himself of the ardent young convert

whom, seven or eight years before, he had befriended in Jerusalem and introduced to the apostles there. "He went forth to Tarsus to seek Saul." And then, for a whole year, the two, who were to be long fellow-labourers in the gospel, wrought together establishing the first Christian Church beyond the limits of Palestine.

We can scarcely be wrong in ascribing mainly to the energy of Saul the strong position Christianity gained in Antioch. His were the logic and originality which made the new religion distinct from the Hebrew faith. Those he found waiting to hear him were awakened, were thinking and hoping. In the young enthusiasm of his soul he did his utmost to convince them; and we can easily imagine how with overmastering power of mind he constrained many to follow the way he had himself been led. When they stood with him in the new liberty of the faith of the Son of God, they were no longer Jews. Their hopes and sympathies were too wide, their view of divine grace too generous. They were now CHRISTIANS—to themselves, to the Jews, and to the world.

Thus Antioch became a centre. With faith came liberality. The Christians there contributed to send help against a famine to the brethren in Judæa; and Barnabas and Saul were



chosen to carry the gift. With increase of spiritual power among themselves came the desire that other cities might share their knowledge of Christ; and Barnabas and Saul were with fasting and prayer sent forth on a missionary journey. Prophets and teachers are named through whom the will of the Holy Spirit was on this occasion made known; and the terms of their deliverance are significant. "The Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them." The Church at Antioch was as yet a Church of the circumcision. The commission, however, was vague, and allowed the evangelists liberty. They understood it to mean that they were to seek the conversion mainly of Jews and proselytes to the Jewish religion. The new apostle was advancing to a conviction that would soon enable him to invite the Gentiles directly into the kingdom of Heaven. Meanwhile he went forth a messenger of Christ to those who already knew and trusted the promises of God.

Before considering the nature and results of the preaching of Paul and the development of it, we may briefly review his missionary travels extending over some thirteen years. The world was before the two evangelists when they set out from Antioch about the year A.D. 46. They

might have turned eastward instead of westward. But Paul's knowledge of the Greek language and literature may be said to have fixed their choice of the latter direction ; and westward also lay the great centres of thought and power. Yet the Dispersion of the Jews had to be thought of. Where were the lost sheep of the house of Israel to be found in greatest numbers ? While Alexandria in Egypt had strong claims, it was well known that the Phrygian and Asian cities had a large Jewish population. The district along the northern coast of the Levant accordingly was the first to which the missionaries directed their course ; and they went by way of Cyprus rather than on foot through Cilicia, where Saul may not at this time have considered it well to appear in his new character as a preacher.

We may reckon a week or rather more for the events that took place in Cyprus, including the conversion of Sergius Paulus, which was exceptional in various senses. From Perga in Pamphylia the way followed was northward to Antioch of Pisidia, eastward to Iconium, southward to Lystra, south-eastward to Derbe. Roughly speaking, the distances were such as might be covered in a journey from Southampton to Kenilworth, thence to Cambridge, Hitchin, and London, and the return was by the same route. As a

result, the first circle of Christian outposts was planted north of the Taurus range.

The second expedition made by Paul, who on this occasion had Silas as his companion, began about the year A.D. 52, and occupied two or three years. Barnabas, who with Mark set out about the same time, sailed to Cyprus; Paul, on the other hand, went by way of Cilicia, and revisited the scenes of his former labours and sufferings, Derbe, Lystra, Iconium. Thence it would have been easy to cross into Asia, where Colosse and Laodicea lay on the main road to Ephesus. This, however, was not his route. He went northward across the plains of the Axylon, and then struck westward by a road leading over broken country to Adramyttium and Troas. So the extreme limit of Asia to the west was reached, and any further advance in that direction must be across the Ægean Sea. The call came from Macedonia. A ship was found which conveyed the evangelists by way of Samothrace to Neapolis, and the landing in Europe was thus made on the northern shore of the Ægean. The chief cities visited were Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea, Athens, Corinth; and at the last a year and a half was spent. On his way back to Syria, Paul had a short time at Ephesus.

The third journey, of the earlier part of which

there are no details, brought the apostle first, apparently, to Lystra, Derbe, Iconium, and Antioch of Pisidia. Thence he travelled by the "upper country"—that is, probably, the high land where the affluents of the Mæander have their sources—to Ephesus; and his stay there was very eventful. Crossing to Macedonia, he went westward to Illyricum, and thence into Greece, and for three months travelled from city to city. The return journey was by way of Macedonia, and by sea from Philippi to Troas. Then, having rejoined the ship at Assos, he sailed by way of Miletus to Tyre. The close of the third journey brings us to about the year A.D. 59.

It may be asked whether the evangelistic work done by Paul and his companions—among whom Barnabas, Aquila and Priscilla, Apollos, Silas, Timothy and Titus may be reckoned—was the main part of the missionary effort made beyond the limits of Palestine up to A.D. 60. Little is said in Acts about the original apostles after Paul appeared on the scene; and few churches seem to have been planted by them. By the time the First Epistle of St. Peter was written, which appears to have been after A.D. 75, Pontus, Cappadocia, and Bithynia, as well as Galatia, must have been widely evangelised. The Apocalypse gives the names of seven churches in Asia

—Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamos, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, Laodicea—and of these only two are specially connected with the name of Paul, Ephesus and Laodicea, to each of which he wrote an epistle. The cluster of neighbour cities, Colosse, Laodicea, and Hierapolis, was not apparently visited by him on any of his journeys. But his energy and example stirred many besides the evangelists already named to the service of the gospel. Epaphroditus (Phil. iv. 18), Tychicus (Eph. vi. 21; Col. iv. 7), Epaphras of Colosse (Col. iv. 12), Archippus (Col. iv. 17), Stephanas, Fortunatus, and Achaicus (1 Cor. xvi. 16), Andronicus and Junias (Rom. xvi. 7), Urbanus (Rom. xvi. 9), Tryphæna and Tryphosa (Rom. xvi. 12), are some of those who, not later than A.D. 64, were known to Paul, and partly under his direction as evangelists. The Church founded in Rome was already large and flourishing in A.D. 58, as the last chapter of the epistle shows. Without attributing to Paul's influence alone the whole of the missionary zeal that was developed in the time between A.D. 46 and A.D. 60, we must conclude that his ardour and instruction were the main sources of an enterprise which extended with amazing rapidity. He speaks of some as having been "in the Lord" before him. But even they learned of him; for the only

gospel for the world was that which he preached. The first epistle written by Peter shows how largely he came under Paul's influence. The Epistle to the Hebrews is to a great extent a development of his views. And when, after long meditation, St. John began to write, it was clear that he had derived something from Paul, although his original mind gave a new cast to the world-evangel.

From this rapid survey of the work of Paul we return to consider the nature of his teaching before the keen opposition of the Judaising party forced him, in self-defence, to readjust and re-state his whole doctrinal system. He began, as we have seen, his first missionary journey, intending to offer the gospel of the Christ mainly to Jews and proselytes of the Jewish faith. A specimen of his preaching is given in Acts xiii. Addressing those who were gathered in the synagogue of Antioch in Pisidia, he opened by touching on some points in the early history of Israel. This introductory sketch is brought down to the life of David, and there he finds the point of relation between the old and the new faith. "Of this man's seed hath God, according to promise, brought unto Israel a Saviour, Jesus." The work of John the Baptist has engaged Paul's attention, and is perhaps referred to because the

Jews of Antioch and neighbouring parts had already heard of the extraordinary awakening which took place under his preaching. (See Acts xviii. 25, xix. 3.) Coming to speak of the gospel, Paul says it is sent as the word of salvation to those who are children of the stock of Abraham, and to those that fear God—that is, the proselytes. And the substance of it is mainly the resurrection of Jesus, whom the people of Jerusalem and the rulers had condemned, knowing Him not, nor the voices of the prophets, although they fulfilled the old oracles by bringing about His death. The resurrection verifies predictions to be found in the Psalms. And through Him who has been raised from the dead without seeing corruption there is proclaimed remission of sins. Those who believe on “this Man” will be justified from all things from which they could not be justified by the law of Moses. It is St. Paul’s teaching as to the saving power of Christ, that He can give remission, not only of ceremonial sins, but of those transgressions from which the law offered no cleansing. This is a personal contribution to the doctrine of Christianity. Here he shows the open door into a liberty of conscience and of life of which the law knew nothing. And it is to this, not to the fulfilment of the destiny of

Israel as a nation, the address advances in its climax. Its last doctrinal word compares the justification brought by Christ with that provided by the law of Moses, and pronounces the latter imperfect. The appeal which follows is based on the prediction that if this work should be despised, this true justification through the true Saviour, those who despise it must perish.

The Pauline doctrine is here in germ, although the necessity of winning Israel kept the preacher on lines conventional. There was but a hint of the wider gospel that was struggling in birth. But, a week afterwards, when the Gentiles of Antioch had been stirred by the talk about a new teaching, and were found crowding in a most unexpected way the Jewish meeting-place, and buzzing about its door, the hour came for a bold advance. Jews were conservative, those of them who were of pure Hebrew birth intensely so. This gathering of heathens annoyed them, "filled them with jealousy." The privileges of their descent and election were threatened, and Paul soon knew the altered temper of the Hebrews. Scarcely had he begun to speak when there were mutterings and contradictions; and opposition grew to a storm. Then the decision was taken, and both the evangelists were agreed in expressing it: "Seeing ye thrust the word of God from



you, and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles." The difference between Paul and Barnabas on the one side, and their Hebrew assailants on the other, was not merely about law-keeping, ritual, or circumcision. The preachers of Christ had a gospel for their soul. Was that to be offered to all who sought after God in their consciousness of need? Against the narrowness which denied the Gentiles any direct access to the promises of God, Paul and Barnabas could not but rebel.

And the word which by instinct came to the lips of Paul, marking the advance in his idea of Christian doctrine, was one he had been learning—who can doubt?—from the memorabilia of Jesus. "Eternal life" is an expression repeatedly attributed to Christ in the synoptical Gospels. If the impressive parable of the Sheep and the Goats was in the mind of Paul—and the circumstances certainly recalled it—he could not forget that "eternal life" was to be the inheritance of those on the right hand of the throne. The Fourth Gospel is, however, that in which this expression most frequently occurs; and we can be almost sure that some of the sayings long afterwards gathered by the Apostle John were already passing from mouth to mouth: "Ye search the Scriptures because ye think that in

them ye have eternal life; and these are they which bear witness of Me." . . . "This is life eternal, that they should know Thee the only true God, and Him whom Thou didst send, *even* Jesus Christ." Luke in narrating how Paul and Barnabas turned to the Gentiles, evidently saw the importance of the new expression used by Paul; for he repeats it. "As the Gentiles heard this, they were glad, and glorified the word of God; and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed."

Although Paul was forced to this break with the Jews of the synagogue at Antioch, it must not be supposed that he departed from his first intention of preaching mainly to those of the old faith. At Iconium, on this first journey, the evangelists began in the synagogue. On his second journey, at Philippi, Paul sought the Jews' place of prayer; at Thessalonica he went on three successive Sabbaths to the synagogue; at Berea, at Corinth, and at Ephesus, he addressed himself to the Jews. It seems to be a point with the historian to show that on no occasion did Paul omit the duty which as an apostle he was bound to recognise, of seeking first the salvation of Israel. And in fact the decision to leave the Israelites to their blindness meanwhile was again urged on Paul by events in Corinth

similar to those in Antioch. The churches, therefore, planted by him, on his first two journeys at least, were of mingled membership. A few of pure Hebrew birth were probably to be found in all of them; but the Jewish element was mainly either Hebrews born abroad or proselytes. And these becoming Christians, were partly carried by the power of Paul's reasoning, partly driven by the opposition of the unbelieving Jews, into so decisive acceptance of Christian truth that they had no difficulty in joining fellowship with the converted Gentiles, a rapidly-increasing number in every Church. The Jews brought, with knowledge of the Old Testament, the habit of worship and the pure morality which were of essential service in the Christian societies. The Gentiles, who had much to learn, supplied a valuable antidote to the legalism from which even believing Jews could not easily divest themselves. Thus of twain one new humanity was made. The elements were those of a Christianity reverent of the past, capable of pressing on with the march of Western life.

The train of thought Paul at first chose in presenting truth to the Gentiles is shown in his speech at Athens. The opportunity of addressing an audience in the centre of Grecian culture was one for which he may have longed, and there can

be no doubt he did his best, both in preparing the minds of his hearers for Christian truth, and urging the impressive facts. Of the manner and matter of his address, it is, from this point of view, impossible to speak too highly. The unity and spirituality of God, His glory in creation and providence, were illustrated and brought home to the audience in contrast to their own imperfect and incoherent beliefs, yet in such a way that no assumption of superiority, or appearance of bigotry could mar the effect of the argument. Human thought had been darkened and restrained by ignorance, and human life had been defiled by sin. To remove the ignorance, a new revelation had been provided, and from the sin a way of repentance had been opened. One signal event had at once declared the grace of God to all, and made certain the judgment of all. The Man ordained to be Judge of the world had been raised by God from the dead. The fact of the resurrection was that by which the heavenly gospel was to gain power in human history, and raise into a new faith individual and social life. On that assured event Paul rested his hope of convincing and converting Athens.

The address was too earnest, too insistent, for the audience as a whole. And yet we cannot doubt that, as some in Athens were impressed by it, so

in every heathen city men of thought hailed this bold teaching as the solution of difficulties which had long perplexed their minds. We may suppose that sometimes, in preaching to heathens, Paul used the proof of Divine providence which was to be found in the history of Israel. At other times he may have begun, as in the Epistle to the Romans, with a stern indictment of the grossness of heathen society, rousing the consciences of men by pointing to crimes which even heathen moralists condemned. In these and other ways, at all events, he and those who learned from him made an impression on the age. We know that during his second visit to Ephesus the population of the great city was so moved by Christian teaching, that Demetrius and his fellow-craftsmen who fashioned shrines for Diana complained of failing trade. This complaint, indeed, was often used on slender provocation, in order to rouse an excitable populace. The sale of a few bundles of hay less or more per day is seriously written about by Pliny as proving that the faith of Christ was spreading to the detriment of trade, or had been happily suppressed. Yet the extraordinary scene in Ephesus when the theatre was filled with a shouting crowd shows how the wind of the gospel was shaking the dry bones of heathenism.

There remain for notice at this stage the two Epistles to the Thessalonians, which were written during the second missionary journey. These show the kind of difficulties that disturbed the churches, especially those mainly composed of converts from heathenism. St. Paul writes to the Thessalonians who had "turned from idols to serve a living and true God, and to wait for His Son from heaven." Speaking in a kindly way of the churches in Judæa, that have endured for the sake of Christ, he congratulates the Thessalonian Christians on having attained the same faith. He complains of the unbelieving Jews who forbid him to speak to the Gentiles, who "fill up their sins always," on whom "the wrath is come to the uttermost." The sufferings of believers in the midst of a hostile heathen population must have been considerable, and one aim of the first epistle is to comfort and support those who had to endure, and to guard them against retaliation. The expectation they were to cherish of the Lord's second coming was a great help to patience, and the apostle writes as if Christ's glorious return might take place even during the lifetime of those he addresses. Another subject on which he enlarges is holy life. The opening passage of chapter iv. is an earnest appeal to the members of the Church to

abjure uncleanness. They are warned that in respect of impurity, "the Lord is an avenger." Paul's own sincerity, singleness of motive, and endurance of affliction for their sakes, supply a plea for the steadfastness of his converts on which he confidently reckons. Wonderful are the religious knowledge and the spirituality to which in a short time the Church has attained. The epistle is full of matter which mere tyros in Christian thought and feeling could not have understood.

A misapprehension on the subject of the second coming of Christ made it necessary for Paul to write, very soon after the first epistle, another in which he is more explicit on the point in question. Again he speaks of the persecutions and afflictions the Thessalonians had to endure, from which they would be delivered "at the revelation of the Lord Jesus from heaven." The disobedient, he said, were only preparing for themselves retribution when that great event took place. Yet Christians were not to think that the day of the Lord was just at hand. There would be, before it, a "falling away," and "the man of sin, the son of perdition, would be revealed, he that opposeth and exalteth himself against all that is called God, or that is worshipped, so that he sitteth in the temple of

God, setting himself forth that he is God." The whole description of this apostasy and of the chief actor in it is of difficult interpretation. The opinion supported by Weiss appears in best agreement with the time and language, that it is a development of the fierce and bigoted opposition of anti-Christian Jews. This, Paul believes, will be headed by a false Messiah, who will actually obtain a place in the temple as the representative of God. Difficulties had arisen in the Church, because some were behaving themselves in a disorderly way. Probably counting on the speedy appearance of Christ, they were refusing to work, and becoming mere busybodies in the worst sense, a nuisance to the rest. These Paul sternly rebukes, exhorting all to continue in well-doing.

The two epistles are interesting, more as showing the state of the Church and certain outlying points of belief and doubt, than as exhibiting the theology of Paul. It has been noted<sup>1</sup> that the death of Christ is only once mentioned, and the cross not even once; and Professor Findlay's explanation stands. The epistles are supplementary to teaching given by word of mouth a few months before. As yet, however, the doctrines of justification by faith and redemption through

<sup>1</sup> *The Epistles of the Apostle Paul*, by G. G. Findlay, B.A., p. 46.



the sacrifice of Christ have not been clearly formulated. The opposition of the unbelieving Jews is not yet exchanged for the far more serious opposition of the Judaising Christians, which drove Paul to find a clear statement of the liberty that is in Christ Jesus.

## CHAPTER V.

### THE LAW AND THE GOSPEL.

THE enlargement of Christianity St. Paul laboured for was not won without a severe struggle, which came to a head about A.D. 53. It is necessary to trace the progress of this dispute, which troubled the churches over a considerable area, and greatly affected the form of Christian doctrine stated by St. Paul. He was driven for a time into strenuous antagonism to men who claimed to be believers ; and one of his epistles shows the heat of his spirit when the freedom of the gospel and its power in the world seemed to be in the greatest peril.

Within the Church at Jerusalem there had been, almost from the first, a sect composed of Pharisees and others, who believed in Jesus as the Messiah, but still held by the ceremonial law, and insisted on its permanent obligation. St. Paul, beginning the Christian life, shook the dust

of Pharisaism from his feet, and soon learned to regard circumcision and uncircumcision alike as of no account beside faith. But those of the ultra-conservative party believed circumcision to be necessary, and would have pressed the rite on all who adopted the faith of Christ. They were in fact bent on making the Church a mere Hebrew sect or synagogue. We hear of these bigoted Judaising Christians after the return of Paul and Barnabas from their first missionary journey. Resuming their ministry at Antioch in Syria, with the new experience and boldness they had gained in Galatia, the evangelists appear to have admitted Gentiles freely into the Church. The door of liberty thus opened was almost immediately noticed by the watchful conservatives of Jerusalem. Very soon a company of them arrived at Antioch, and began to denounce what had been done. There was controversy which grew to dissension, and bitter feelings were stirred. But division was prevented. Loyal to the Church, St. Paul did not break with the narrow sectaries. He agreed to appeal to the apostles and elders in the mother-city; and at the conference held there, under the presidency of James, the matter was discussed and to all appearance settled. The Judaising section urged their view. On the other side St. Peter gave his opinion strongly.

When James pronounced the decision, harmony seemed to be restored.

Unfortunately, however, the conduct of Peter soon afterwards did not accord with his speech at the conference. He had broken bread with a Roman centurion, converted under his own preaching. At Antioch, on the other hand, in the presence of men who claimed to know the mind of James, he refused to eat with the uncircumcised Gentiles whom Paul and Barnabas had admitted to the Church. And the sinister influence of his refusal spread. The others in Antioch who were of Jewish birth separated themselves with him. Perhaps the converts from heathenism were men of low caste and little knowledge, scarcely weaned from their idolatry, speaking "half in the speech of Ashdod." The Jew, unaccustomed to Gentile freedom and conversation, would feel a moral shock, and instinctively recoil from those who were to sit with him at the Lord's table. The revulsion was perhaps as strong as would have been felt if, in the time of slavery in America, negroes had proposed to sit down with their white masters. Be this as it may, the result was very unfortunate. The conduct of Peter and those who followed him gave new support to the Judaising sect. It was implied that until Gentiles were purified by the

Mosaic rites they could not be acknowledged as Christian brethren.

St. Paul condemned Peter strongly for his vacillation, and the words of rebuke must have carried considerable weight. We so judge from the tenor of the First Epistle of Peter, which is thoroughly generous and catholic. But the Judaising party, counting, as it would seem, on the support of James, whether with or without reason, were confirmed in their view, and began to plot against Paul as a dangerous innovator and enemy of religion. On his second missionary journey, however, these opponents did not overtake him. The hindrances he encountered were as before from Jews, determined to give no quarter to a religion which opened wide to Gentiles the door of hope. At their hands he suffered afresh, in Thessalonica, Corinth, and Ephesus. The feeling shown by these persecutors was nearly the same as that of the Judaising Christians, but it was far less dangerous to the gospel. To be denounced by Jews was no doubt painful; but they were open enemies of Christ: to endure their persecution was to testify on behalf of Divine grace. But when those who professed to believe in Jesus as the Messiah turned against Paul and began to condemn him, the gospel was wounded in the

house of its friends. This was treachery as well as enmity. St. Paul was stirred as he had never been.

And when, in the churches of Galatia, the Judaisers commenced their work of subversion, something Paul had done in perfect good faith, on his second journey, gave them a weapon against that very doctrine of Christian liberty which was so dear to him. At Lystra he had found a young convert of the name of Timothy, son of a Jewish mother married to a Greek. According to his own rule, Paul would have said that circumcision was unnecessary. If a Gentile did not need to undergo the rite, neither did one who was half a Jew. But, with his customary readiness to yield in non-essentials, Paul deferred to the opinion of Jews, who held that Timothy could not be in the right relation to God and to his Hebrew ancestry without circumcision; and the rite was performed. The concession thus made proved to be ill-timed. Very soon afterwards, the Judaising sectaries followed Paul from Antioch in Syria to Galatia; and, beginning their work of detraction, they could point to what had been done in Timothy's case as entirely in harmony with their view, and affirm that there was the best reason for the circumcision of every convert.

The opinion has been widely held, that the Galatian churches in which the Judaizing party had most success were situated in the Gallic district, lying in the central or north-central region of what we now call Asia Minor. The difficulties of this view are considerable, and have been fully and ably set forth by Professor W. M. Ramsay, in his work, *The Church in the Roman Empire before A.D. 170*. He shows that the Roman province of Galatia, extending irregularly from Pontus and Bithynia in the north to Pamphylia in the south, and including Lycaonia and part of Phrygia, is that referred to in Acts when the name Galatia is used. His conclusions not only establish the accuracy of the travel-document of Luke, but explain away what is incomprehensible, that churches well known and important, visited once and again by St. Paul, evidently among the first he founded, and enjoying much of his thought and care, should be not so much as named in the Acts of the Apostles. It was supposed that Paul preached in the northern or Gallic part of Galatia on his second missionary journey. But this region did not lie in the way from Phrygia to Mysia, or to any point which might be described as over against Mysia. The map which accompanies Professor Ramsay's book exhibits the results of the closest

modern research and the best knowledge of ancient geography; and a glance at it, taken along with the author's careful reasoning, throws much light on the whole subject of the Galatian churches and the epistle addressed to them. Antioch by Pisidia, Iconium, Lystra, Derbe—the churches founded on St. Paul's first journey, visited also by him on his second and third journeys—are, by Professor Ramsay's showing, the churches of the epistle.

The arguments for this conclusion cannot here be stated. But any one making trial of the theory will find that it clears the history for him. In Gal. iv. 13, for example, reference is made to the first or former time when the gospel was preached to those churches; and this falls in with the statement of Acts, that they were visited by Paul not only on his first, but also on his second journey. There is some difference of opinion as to the precise time when the epistle was written. But Professor Ramsay's theory admits of a date during the second journey, perhaps the latter part of the stay at Corinth, or a date following the close of that journey. The whole circumstances, and the feelings of the writer as they are to be gathered from the epistle, correspond with what is narrated in Acts. The churches, mainly Gentile



(Gal. iv. 8), were in localities where Jewish opinion had considerable vogue, and the Old Testament was easily accessible, for appeal is often made to it. The large Jewish population and the synagogues in all four towns account for this. It is amazing to St. Paul that those Galatians should have fallen away from their liberty in Christ (Gal. i. 6). He can explain it in no other way than that they have been bewitched (ch. iii. 1). And the experiences Paul had in the South-Galatian towns show why he was astonished. At every one of them he gave the gospel to the Gentiles, in the face of the most violent opposition of the Jews. The system that now bewitched his converts denied them any part in Christ. We may surmise that the reading and exposition of the Hebrew Scriptures in the Christian assemblies had prepared the converts to be fascinated by the Judaising theory, which, they may have thought, would give them not only the standing of believers in Christ, but also the place of members in the venerable Church of the Old Testament. The antiquity of the Hebrew faith was attractive, for it exceeded that of their ancestral worship of Zeus and Hermes.

The case of Titus is specially referred to in the epistle, and is evidently brought forward by

St. Paul as against that of Timothy, whose circumcision by his order was well known in all the churches. Speaking of the visit he made to Jerusalem after his first journey, he says: "Not even Titus who was with me, being a Greek, was compelled to be circumcised." Paul had actually taken to Jerusalem in his train an uncircumcised Greek, and presented him as a Christian. To the "false brethren" who urged then that Titus should be circumcised, Paul "gave place in the way of subjection, not for an hour." The Galatians could see for themselves how different was the case of Timothy. Had the sectaries, basing on this, dared to say of him that he preached circumcision? (Gal. v. 11). It was absurd. "I, brethren, if I preach circumcision, why am I then persecuted" by those who believe in circumcision? He had yielded, by way of conciliation, perhaps at the instance of the grandmother and mother of Timothy. Surely that might be distinguished from the retrogressive insistence on circumcision which the Judaising Christians made their main point.

The great purpose of the epistle is to set forth the doctrine of Christianity in opposition to belief in law-keeping as a means of salvation. Beginning with a strong affirmation that the gospel he had preached to the Galatians was the

only gospel, Paul found it necessary to vindicate his right to speak on Christ's behalf as an inspired apostle; and he did so by giving a plain account of his religious experience, and the commission he had from the Lord. He had been endowed with spiritual understanding, and had stood upon his knowledge of the mind of Christ even in rebuking one who was an apostle before him. The Galatians had been hearing denials of his claim to teach Christianity; they might now judge for themselves. The apologetic statement passes, at ch. ii. 15, into a strain of argument turning on Paul's personal experience of death to the law and its works—that is, to all those outward ceremonies and rites of which circumcision was the type. Then appeal is made to the religious history of the Galatian converts themselves. The great gift of the Spirit had been bestowed upon them; life in the Spirit had begun; they had suffered for their Christian faith and hope; “powers” (ch. iii. 5) had been wrought among them: and all this had been apart from the law, when they simply believed in Christ. They heard much about Abraham and the argument that circumcision was instituted as a sign of the covenant of God with him. But the faith of Abraham, not circumcision, brought him justification; and it

was in prospect of the faith of the Gentiles God had made the promise that in Abraham all the families of the earth should be blessed. The law detained under a curse those who were subject to it, for no one kept it in every point. And Christ redeems all who trust Him from this very curse, "having become a curse for us," in submitting to death by hanging on a tree. J

Then, again, as to the covenant made with Abraham and the promise which was to be fulfilled in his seed—that is, in Christ as Head of the new kingdom of faith—the law came four hundred and thirty years later. The law was not the most ancient institution by any means. If the Galatians desired antiquity, they must pass it by; and the rather that it was added because of transgressions. Had Israel been true to the old Abrahamic covenant, and believed like Abraham, the law would not have been necessary. Were Christians to bind themselves by a system which had no life-giving power, but only restrained and shut up all things under sin? That system was meant for the childhood of spiritual life, the tutelage of the soul. Christ gives the full privilege of sonship, and in Him the law is superseded. To be Christ's is to enter on the inheritance which the law could never give; it is to have the freedom, the re-

demption, the fellowship with God of those who are at home with Him.

The Galatians had once been in bondage to gods that were no gods. Under the false system of that idolatry they had known the insufficiency of "weak and beggarly rudiments." The ceremonies and feasts of Judaism, if kept in a legal spirit, as a meritorious burdening of the life for religion's sake, were of the same nature as the old idolatrous observances. Those who practised Jewish rites were going back to a lower type of religion; and Paul was afraid "lest by any means he had bestowed labour upon them in vain." There were personal reminiscences of his work among them on which he could not return without deep emotion; and he now recalled the kindness he had received at the hands of his converts, in the hope of bringing back their early confidence in his teaching. His letter is in the same strain of earnest solicitude for their spiritual life as his first labour among them had been.

Proceeding with his argument after this appeal, he uses, in a way that would be quite intelligible to those who had been hearing the rabbinisms of Jewish orators, the allegory of Isaac and Ishmael, to show the freedom of true sonship; and then he advances to the strongest

point of his epistle: "Behold, I Paul say unto you, that, if ye receive circumcision, Christ will profit you nothing." The adoption of ceremonialism and legalism would entirely alter their relation to Christ. Trusting in law-keeping, they would fall away from grace. "Ye are severed from Christ, ye who would be justified by the law."

Such, then, is Paul's vigorous protest against the Judaising Christians, his attempt to undo their false teaching. The whole argument is, in a sense, doctrinal; yet the doctrine is closely connected with worship and character. The law that is set aside is the ceremonial law, not the moral law of the ten commandments and the Pentateuch generally. Not till afterwards did Paul enter on the relation of Christianity to the ethics of Judaism. In this epistle, indeed, he may have failed to make his meaning quite clear, for at one place (ch. v. 14) he speaks of the whole law as fulfilled in the precept, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself"—which, of course, is to be kept.<sup>1</sup> While most persons would understand this, some might be perplexed. And we can easily believe that he himself was led to think out the subject, and to treat it in

<sup>1</sup> Compare the treatment of this matter by Weizsäcker, *The Apostolic Age*, English Trans. p. 155.

the Epistle to the Romans, by noticing or being shown the difficulty his language caused. The worship, the kind of thinking that accompanied the worship, the reflex influence on character which ceremonialism produced—these were the vital matters that occupied Paul's mind, for in these lay the barriers to salvation. With ceremonialism went the certainty of self-righteousness, narrowness of view, a low and injurious idea of religion and of God. By and by there would be discontent with the system, which could not long satisfy those who had once seen the freedom of grace. And discontent with the system might result in abandoning the faith. But, on the other hand, with belief in Christ went the pursuit of a high and liberating ideal, constant dependence on the grace of the Holy Spirit, largeness of nature, spiritual redemption. Contrasting the law and the gospel, the language of St. Paul is in no respect too strong, too eager for the occasion. His promising churches are like to be entangled in a fatal net. Once for all he must show what the danger is, and bring every possible argument and appeal to bear on the minds of the converts.

The Epistle to the Galatians sets forth the first stage of Paul's doctrine of justification by faith. Against the attempts to obtain acceptance

and standing in the kingdom of God by the way of observing rites, ceremonies, feasts, cleansings, abstinence from certain foods, he places the one liberating and exalting call to believe. And the cross is central. Relying on the Lord Jesus Christ who was crucified for them, living in the faith of this Saviour, crucifying the flesh with its affections and lusts, they would be sons of God. The justification of their lives would be assured to their own consciousness. Not as fettered slaves would they move, nor as children without any real part in the activities of the spiritual kingdom, but as free men, guided by the inner light of the Spirit, who should of the Spirit reap everlasting life.

We cannot tell how far this masterly epistle served its end. It seems to have gained wide acceptance almost at once, and in Galatia at least to have arrested the heresy against which it was directed. Towards the close of St. Paul's life there was no little confused teaching, which mingled some of the old Jewish ceremonialism with oriental notions of late introduction. In the Epistle to Titus we have hints of this. But the attempt to drag Christianity back to the prison of Judaism must have been given up as futile at a very early date. A modified conservatism survived in Judæa for a few generations ;



the case was different, however, among the Gentiles, to whom the distinctive practices of Judaism were naturally and increasingly distasteful. We may take it that the most of the Galatian believers kept the way of liberty; and, like others in those days, they needed to be restrained in their use of Christian freedom itself.

Passing meanwhile the Epistles to the Corinthians, which develop very strikingly the doctrines of salvation through the death of Christ and the sanctifying power of the Spirit, we proceed to look at the teaching of the Epistle to the Romans in so far as it carries to a further stage, and in a sense completes, the discussion of Christianity in relation to the law of Moses. The Roman Church must have had many converts from Judaism among its members. The whole scope of the treatise shows how interest in the destiny of Israel had called for a clear vindication of the gospel as in no sense opposed to the promises and Divine inspiration of the Old Testament. The strain is throughout conciliatory to the Jews, who appear to have been sincerely anxious to find a resolution of perplexing questions. Gentile Christians may also, of course, have desired to comprehend the connection between the Old Covenant and the New. The whole of Paul's dialectical skill had

here a worthy field; and as the argument is carried from point to point, the splendid inspiration of the writer yields its finest fruit.

The law ceremonial, a system of outward observances, was that on which the Judaizing Christians had insisted in addressing the Galatian churches. In his epistle to them, accordingly, Paul had confined himself to ceremonialism. The subject of moral obedience and its value was scarcely touched. It was indeed only against the restraining, narrowing system of ritual and form that the liberty in Christ, so often spoken of in the Epistle to the Galatians, could be strongly asserted. Had it entered St. Paul's mind that freedom from the moral law might be claimed, he would certainly have guarded his language. But the Galatians knew, or should have known, what he meant. Now, in writing to the Romans, he has others beside the Judaizing heretics in view; and from the first the law is considered in its moral aspect. Rite and ceremony are not excluded from the discussion; but the subject is much more difficult than when they alone were concerned. The aim of the apostle, indeed, is to carry thought beneath them, to the realities of Judaism, the ideas represented by its rites, and to show the gospel as the way to a salvation the moral law of the Old

Covenant could not give. The course of argument is as follows:—

To the extent to which Judaism was profitable as a divine religion, circumcision was only of value as a sign of the consecration of the heart. And Judaism, with this sign and the consecration it represented, gave the true Israelite great advantage. For the true Israelite, believing God, was justified through his faith, and his faith was greatly helped by the oracles of God which were given to Israel. Obedience of the moral law and observance of the ceremonial law did not justify him. The most obedient Jew was still, so far as the law was concerned, under sin and the judgment of God. The righteousness of God is of His grace, apart from the law, to him who believes. And this righteousness has its fulfilment in Christ, “whom God set forth to be a propitiation, through faith, by His blood.”

The case of Abraham, treated in the Epistle to the Galatians, seems to have been perpetually recurring. Now it is finally disposed of. Abraham was justified before he received the sign of circumcision. That rite was “a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had, yet being uncircumcised.” The promise, moreover, that he should be heir of the world was not through the law; it was of faith, that it might

be according to grace. As for the law, it really makes transgression evident, that need may be felt of forgiveness, and of that grace of God on which forgiveness depends. The whole human race, with Adam as its head, was under sin; and the Mosaic law came in beside, that offence might abound. It made duty multiform, keeping pace, we may say, with the evolution of the human mind and of society; and the extension and definiteness of the law of duty necessarily made failures more numerous and conspicuous. Now the gospel is, that where sin abounded grace abounds much more, that grace reigns through righteousness unto eternal life through Jesus Christ.

But did this mean that holy life is no longer binding on those who are in the liberty of grace? In no sense. The faith in Christ which gives justification means dying with Him unto sin. Liberation from sin is insured by the new life derived from Christ—not by obedience, which is futile, but by the Spirit, who makes believers free sons of God. The believer dies to the law, even to the moral law, as a system exercising dominion. But, dying to the law and living by faith, he is not set free from holiness; he is, on the other hand, united to Him who cleanses from every evil thought and desire. The law still

seems to have hold of the believer on the side of his flesh, his bodily appetites and baser feelings; and there it continues to restrain and convict and kill; but in the spirit he is free, an heir of God and joint-heir with Christ.

Israel's portion was that of the most privileged people. But the promises of God were never for the whole of the Hebrew nation. They were for the election, a favoured race within the favoured people. How were those of the election chosen, why were they chosen to receive the grace that made them true believers in God? That Paul cannot tell. He can only say, it was of God, who "hath mercy on whom He will, and whom He will He hardeneth." There is still an election of grace in Israel, and there will continue to be such a remnant. If, indeed, those constituting the remnant do not believe in Christ, even they must fall off like withered branches, their faith not uniting them to the living root. But they have this advantage, that meanwhile they can be easily grafted into the true olive.

It cannot be supposed that this account of the relation between Judaism and Christianity was at once understood and made part of the creed of the churches. Doubtless it satisfied the minds of many whose study of the Old Testament

and hereditary belief in the law had brought them into perplexity. To many others, however, without sufficient knowledge of the Hebrew Scriptures, it must have been perplexing rather than helpful, as it is, indeed, to numbers of Christians still. Yet the inspired teaching of St. Paul in this epistle provided for all inquirers, as they became able to receive his doctrine, the solution of a difficult question none of the other apostles appear to have touched. And in another direction he led the churches to a faith which was immediately understood and accepted—the faith in Christ's atoning death as the means of remission and salvation. To this we shall now turn our thought.

Our examination of the addresses recorded in the Acts of the Apostles showed that, so far as those addresses represent the earliest form of gospel preaching, remission of sins and the Christian hope were not at first connected with the death of our Lord, but with His resurrection. The doctrine of Christ Himself regarding His death was, that He came "not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give Himself a ransom for many"; that His blood was to be "shed for many unto remission of sins" (St. Matt. xxvi. 28). Neither during His continuance on earth nor for some time afterwards was

this rightly understood ; and it was to St. Paul first the importance of the death of Christ was clearly revealed. His careful inquiry into the reminiscences of our Lord's teaching, his close study of the circumstances attending the trial and crucifixion of Christ, the need he felt for a system of doctrine that would entirely set aside the ceremonialism and priestly officialism of the Jewish Church, were the conditions out of which arose by degrees, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, that gospel of atonement which was his great gift to the world. The subject was too great, and presented too many aspects, to be completely formulated in one sentence or in many. He returned to it again and again, adding thought to thought, statement to statement, each bringing into view something more of the great revelation of Divine grace.

When the Epistles to the Thessalonians were written, the truth had not presented itself to the mind of St. Paul in the definite form it afterwards assumed. Those epistles belong, as Professor Findlay says, "to an early period in the development of Gentile Christianity, and to an early phase of the apostle's doctrine."<sup>1</sup> And it is only *in germ* that the whole Pauline theology of the cross can be held to be involved in what is said of the "obtaining of salvation through

<sup>1</sup> *The Epistles of Paul the Apostle*, p. 45.

our Lord Jesus Christ." But the Epistle to the Galatians shows a very distinct advance. Now it is affirmed that Christ "gave Himself for our sins, that He might deliver us out of this present evil world." Paul's personal relation to Christ is expressed in the words: "I have been crucified with Christ . . . who loved me and gave Himself up for me." To the Galatians, Jesus Christ had been "openly set forth crucified"; His crucifixion was one of the great facts which had deeply impressed the converts, and attached them to the Saviour. We have a glimpse of the difficulties under which the glorious apologetic of the Divine death came to be entered upon by Paul, where he says: "I, brethren, if I still preach circumcision, why am I still persecuted? Then hath the stumbling-block of the cross been done away"; and again: "As many as desire to make a fair show in the flesh, they compel you to be circumcised; only that they may not be persecuted for the cross of Christ." The Judaising Christians appear to have minimised the cross, regarding it probably as the shame of the Jewish Church, an accident, by no means necessary to the complete Messianic work of Christ. But Paul saw things quite differently. It was his boast to believe in the Crucified. The endurance of that death which brought our Lord under the



curse of the law, and destroyed its power, was to him the very heart of the gospel. "Far be it from me to glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world hath been crucified unto me, and I unto the world."

We are accustomed to read into these expressions, all of which belong to the Epistle to the Galatians, the ideas that are set forth in Romans. This, however, is chronologically a mistake, although in ordinary thought and teaching it may be reckoned perfectly allowable. To the Galatians, Paul does not speak of atonement or propitiation, nor does he mention the blood of Christ. The expression in 1 Thessalonians, "Jesus Christ who died for us," is now followed up by the clearer statement, "who gave Himself for our sins." Yet in Galatians justification is "through faith in Jesus Christ," not yet as in Romans, "by His blood." The law pronounces one who hangs on a tree accursed. This Paul boldly seizes as an explanation of the power of Christ to take away the condemnation of the law. Its curse is borne for men and borne away. He who bore it is by that very act the Redeemer, the Justifier. Unbelieving Jews might insist that the curse rested on Christ. Judaising Christians might in various ways try to get over the difficulty that He in whom they professed

to believe as the Messiah had "hung on a tree." But Paul compelled all Christians to fix their attention on the cross. It was there the law was challenged, defied, and overcome. Through Christ's endurance of the cross all who believe escape the condemnation of the law. Paul is crucified with Christ, glories in the cross; for through that cross, as he now sees its meaning, he has entered on a new life—a redeemed life. In Christ crucified he escapes the law, and becomes dead to the world, as if his eyes had closed upon its evil allurements for ever.

A few years were passed by St. Paul in the practical work of an evangelist, and in earnest study carried on patiently in his home at Antioch, and during his travels by many a lonely road; and then, in the Epistle to the Romans, he stated the doctrine of the cross so as to set aside and give far more than a substitute for the old Mosaic system of expiation. Justification, he says, is freely by the grace of God, "through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: whom God set forth to be a propitiation, through faith, by His blood, to show His (God's) righteousness, because of the passing over of the sins done aforetime, in the forbearance of God." The idea thus carefully expressed is larger far than that of the passage in Galatians

just considered; and it is also more penetrating. It is larger, for now the grace that mingles with the whole providence of God is seen culminating in "the redemption that is in Christ Jesus." The curse of the law pronounced on one who hangs on a tree recedes before the thought of God's power to justify, by means of a great propitiation, all the ungodly who believe. It is more penetrating, for the doctrine enters into the need of the sinful to have a sufficient pledge and availing symbol of reconciliation; and this is declared to be provided, not by Christ's hanging on a tree, but in His blood. Passages that follow seem intended to set in its right place that earlier form of teaching which attached remission and spiritual joy to the resurrection of Christ and His exalted life. The reconciliation that is brought about by the death of Christ takes effect on those who are enemies of God, converting them into His friends. Believing in Christ crucified for them, they are "justified by His blood" (ch. v. 9). But salvation is in His life: "We were buried therefore with Him through baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we also might walk in newness of life." There is death with Christ unto sin, life in Him unto God.

It is to be noted that throughout the Epistle to the Romans Christ is never said to have died as a sacrifice. For some reason, St. Paul appears to have decided not to use that word of the old dispensation. But something far higher and more significant is implied when he says: "As through one man's disobedience many were made sinners, even so through the obedience of the One shall the many be made righteous." The only instances of the use of the idea of sacrifice in the writings of Paul are in 1 Cor. v. 7: "Our passover also hath been sacrificed, even Christ"; and in Eph. v. 2: "Christ also loved you, and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for an odour of a sweet smell." The great difference between the blood of animals led ignorantly to the slaughter, and the blood of Christ who gave Himself for us, required this sparing use of the analogy. Writing to the Romans, Paul had to guard against the misconception not only of Jews, but of those who were familiar with the sacrifices offered to idols, between which and the oblation of Christ there lay an immeasurable breadth of sacred purpose and sanctifying power.

## CHAPTER VI.

### INSTITUTIONAL DEVELOPMENT.

FOR human salvation no elaborate machinery is required. The way for the believer is one not of restraint, but of redemption; the government is not from without, but by an authority that has its seat in the heart. While the unity and simplicity of their first enthusiasm continued, the Christians can hardly be said to have needed or had any organization. Christ seemed to rule with a gentle touch. His living hand guided every movement, His will controlled the activity of each life. There was co-operation without restraint, true harmony without the need of rules. And this was in the line of the ideal to which our Lord pointed when He said, "The kingdom of God is within you." The new Church would be a real theocracy, a divine republic, in which every one should do what is right according to the example of Christ and the

will of the Spirit. With brotherliness and love, each would find the way of consideration for others to be that of self-development. There would be no lords over the Divine heritage: all would be alike kings and priests unto God.

But the ideal was not realised, has never been realised. Early in the day of Christianity, it was found that for fellowship and co-operation there must be laws and governments. The aim became complex, the elements multiform. Ignorant persons joined the Christian society; and the self-willed, the ambitious, not soundly converted to lowliness and love, had to be controlled. Those who thought they had a call to be teachers, but knew not whereof they affirmed, had to be set under discipline. And since apostolic authority could not be exercised at every point continually, the organization of the churches had to follow the plan of one or other existing scheme of government. From the day elders were first appointed, to the present, the order of the Christian society has been matter of experiment, and from an early date it has been matter of discussion.

Along with the government, the sacraments, creed, and worship of the Church had their development. Very simple, and indeed indeterminate, at first, they tended to become elaborate;

and the process of elaboration brought controversy, variety, division. Within the apostolic period the beginnings of this are to be traced. One and another, especially St. Paul, with inspired decision, laid down principles which were not always understood. In four or five centuries the churches organized by the apostles grew to be very different from the simple societies they intended. Officialism, which is of the world, found a new scene of operation, and the sacraments, the creed, the worship, came in every circumstance under supervision and control. The Church was no longer free: within it individual lives were governed by a new rabbinism.

Our aim at present will be to note the chief points of order and the principal observances of the Church, while the direct superintendence of the apostles kept officialism in check. We shall see that no codified law nor stereotyped ritual was imposed to hinder the free activity of the churches. All that belonged to outward arrangement was still amenable to the spiritual life. Towards the close of the chapter, attention will be given to the idea of the Church as it appears in the epistles, and the conception of catholicity embodied in the later writings of St. Paul.

1. *Government*.—Nothing, we have seen, is

more significant on this head than the unconventional freedom of the first Christian society. The apostles stood practically on the same level as the other members of the Church—the men and women whose faith in Christ was as firm and sincere as their own. The brotherhood was real. Certain of the apostles, no doubt, took the lead, and the apostolate as a whole had due respect; yet leadership was never claimed as a right, nor was deference enforced. All followed cordially when Peter showed the way, as they would also have followed if Mary, the mother of our Lord, had shown a better way. The knowledge and inspiration of the eleven gave them superiority, but they never presumed on it, nor did they even regard their special vocation as beyond the reach of other disciples. Matthias having been elected by the Church, was admitted to the full status of an apostle. It will be found that this position of leadership without formal insistence on authority was that which all along contented the apostles, and gave full scope for their powers.

It is a singular fact, conclusive against any theory of the dictatorship of the apostles, that James, our Lord's brother, presided at the convention held in Jerusalem. True, he is spoken of by St. Paul, in the Epistle to the Galatians, as



one of the apostles; but this only shows that the original group made no exclusive claim of authority; and the general position of James, Peter, and John is not obscurely indicated by the expressions used of them—"who were of repute," "who were reputed to be pillars." By tacit yet hearty consent of the Church, they had the lead in affairs, that was all. And the presidency held by James was not an office formally conferred; it was a duty undertaken. We know, however, that prescriptive rights grow out of casual superiority. And James may, as Dr. Lightfoot has argued,<sup>1</sup> have come to be a kind of bishop. Whether this was always and in all things to the advantage of the Church, is quite another question. Evidently Paul did not hold himself bound by the opinions of the apostles who were before him, or of James. His free criticism of them showed that he felt himself, as a Christian thinker, to be on ground they could not dispute; and, in his own turn, he made no claim of lordship over the faith of others (2 Cor. i. 24). With the assurance of inspiration that gradually came to him as he found the power of the gospel which he preached, Paul certainly held himself entitled to give directions in the name of Christ. He uses expressions such as these: "In giving you

<sup>1</sup> *Dissertations on the Apostolic Age*, p. 155.

this charge" (1 Cor. xi. 17); "As I gave order to the churches of Galatia" (1 Cor. xvi. 1). Yet at other times he distinguishes between the authoritative word and his own personal opinion: "To the rest say I, not the Lord" (1 Cor. vii. 12). And the modesty of his claim to be recognised as a guide in Christian faith and morals is clearly set forth: "We preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake" (2 Cor. iv. 5); "I Paul myself intreat you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ, I who in your presence am lowly among you, but being absent am of good courage toward you" (2 Cor. x. 1). He seems to have regarded inspiration as a Divine gift, which had to win acceptance and make its own way; his position and right as an inspired man and an apostle had to commend themselves to those he addressed. Never once did he take his stand on absolute authority, and say, whether your conscience and reason approve or not, this must be. His motto was, "By the manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God" (2 Cor. iv. 2). Strange indeed was the retrogression from this kind of spiritual dignity to that claimed later by bishops of the Church. The less of the spirit of meekness and of Christ there was, the more con-

fidet appear to have been the assertions of Divine right to dictate and overbear.

The first men set apart within the Church for special duty were the seven whose appointment is recorded in Acts vi. Those chosen on this occasion were required simply to distribute the gifts of the Church to the dependent widows. There is no evidence that persons were specially needed in every church to serve in the same way as in Jerusalem. In the larger societies, however, the office of deacons was instituted. We have incidental notice of deacons in the Church of Philippi; and in 1 Tim. repeated reference is made to the diaconate, and rules are laid down regarding those who should be ordained to it. Many of those first chosen to "serve tables" were soon engaged as evangelists; and we can easily believe that the higher duty, either of preaching or of the eldership, usually followed and superseded one that was mainly secular. The qualities pointed to in 1 Tim. iii. 8, 9, 12, 13, indicate a fitness for other than administrative work. "They that have served well as deacons gain to themselves a good standing, and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus."

The eldership was a natural adaptation of the order of *zēgēnim*, or senators, in the Hebrew

synagogue, called also *parnasim*, or pastors, of the flock. The presbyters or elders of Jerusalem are mentioned first in Acts xv. as associated with the apostles in discussing the question sent up from Antioch. Like the corresponding officials in the synagogue, these Christian elders had a charge in doctrine and discipline as well as administration. In the Epistle of James, a singular half-sacerdotal function is ascribed to them. Any one who is sick is to send for the elders of the church, who will "pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord." This appears to have been a practice taken across from Judaism. St. Peter in his First Epistle (ch. v. 1) lays aside his apostolic dignity to claim the eldership. It was the one office which, side by side with the apostolate, implied spiritual oversight of the church in which it was exercised. "Prophets" and "teachers" are also spoken of as enjoying an acknowledged position. But these were not in the same category. They spoke and taught, not as chosen to an office, but under the impulse of the Spirit. On his first missionary journey St. Paul appointed elders in each of the churches he had founded; and to these elders or presbyters he appears to refer in 1 Thess. v. 12, where he says: "We beseech you, brethren, to know them that labour among you

and are over you in the Lord and admonish you ; and to esteem them exceeding highly in love for their work's sake." Already a very definite and authoritative government of each Christian society had been set up ; and the responsibility of those who ruled and taught was to Christ Himself, rather than to the membership of the church.

It is impossible to say what was the rule in the election of these elders, and the probability is that, while the apostles lived, no definite procedure had been settled. St. Paul seems to have chosen fit men when he found them, and with prayer, and perhaps the laying on of hands, inducted them to the office. In other cases, the members of the church appear to have had a part in the choice of their presbyters. The election of Matthias was a precedent in the method of appointment, and the use of the word *χειροτονέω*, "choose by voting" (2 Cor. viii. 19), seems to show that the democratic order prevailed. We must believe that in general, unless an apostle or apostolic deputy like Timothy exercised his right, the whole membership of the church voted in the appointment both of elders and deacons.

It is not necessary to discuss the subject of the episcopate at any length. Admission has been made that James, our Lord's brother, may

have been a permanent preses of the elders in the Church of Jerusalem, *primus inter pares*, and this may be called his episcopate. Timothy, again, who had a certain charge of the churches in Macedonia and Ephesus, may be said to have exercised the episcopal office, though some Episcopalian writers prefer to say that he was a kind of vicar-apostolic. He received from St. Paul directions regarding the qualifications of the "bishops" (1 Tim. iii. 1 *ff.*), who also appear as elders (ch. v. 17); he ordains them, or takes part in their ordination. Yet his office is almost on a level with theirs. He has himself received a sacred endowment "by prophecy, with the laying on of the hands of the presbytery" (1 Tim. iv. 14), St. Paul himself having taken part with the elders in his ordination (2 Tim. i. 6). Dr. Lightfoot's argument for a three-fold ministry is cautious, conspicuously free from sacerdotalism, and therefore deserving of special attention. His opinion is, that there must have been a kind of episcopate at an early date, and that it "cannot, without violence to historical testimony, be dissociated from the name of St. John."<sup>1</sup> But he holds that the episcopate was "created out of the presbytery";<sup>2</sup> and this creation, he further says, "was not so much an

<sup>1</sup> *Dissertations on the Apostolic Church*, p. 242.    <sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* p. 190.

isolated act as a progressive development. . . . The original relation of the bishop to the presbyter . . . was not forgotten, even after the lapse of centuries. Though set over the presbyters, he was still regarded as, in some sense, one of them." It would have been entirely contrary not only to the teaching of St. Paul, but also to the teaching and spirit of St. John, that an apostle should be a lord over God's heritage; and that a bishop should assume even the name of lord is a singular, one must say, an unpardonable divergence from the scriptural idea of office in a Christian church. The *jus magisterii*, or right of government, which is held to justify the title of lord, is indeed a large assumption. It gives the modern bishop far higher authority than the apostles ever spoke of possessing. "He is," says Canon Liddon, "by his office not merely the *caput* but the *radix ecclesiæ*, the source and origin of all the activities for good within his diocese."<sup>1</sup> A claim like this is simply astounding in the light of history and common sense. ✓

In harmony with the early idea of a church as a spiritual fraternity of believers in Christ, all of whom were "priests unto God," there came to be, first, for order's sake, the eldership or presbytery. Occasionally, one elder so distinguished

<sup>1</sup> Sermon in *The Contemporary Pulpit*, vol. iii. p. 330.

himself by his preaching gifts or administrative ability, that he stood naturally first among the brethren as pastor or as teaching elder. Sometimes, again, a church may have supplied only one man fit for the eldership. The presbyters were ἐπίσκοποι, overseers; and he who was for some reason chief among them might be ὁ ἐπίσκοπος. But there was certainly no rule nor understanding that a bishop in each church was to have peculiar lordship as a successor of the apostles, and that bishops were to “reproduce from age to age among men the fulness of the apostolic authority.” The idea came with officialism; and in regard to that, Canon Liddon is a writer who blows hot and cold. He would not altogether bless it, perhaps; still less would he curse or seem to question.

2. *Observances*.—The worship of the primitive Christian society appears to have consisted of extemporaneous prayers, suited to the needs and circumstances of the Church, along with some forms of adoration, familiar through their use in the synagogue. Reading of the books of the Old Testament, passages from which were introduced into almost every discourse, must have been also part of the service. In token of brotherly feeling, the disciples partook together



of a common meal, at the close of which wine was distributed as a "cup of blessing." The *αγάπη*, or love-feast, and the *δεῖπνον κυρίου*, or Supper of the Lord, were not at first discriminated. It was only after some time, when the significance of the death of Christ was understood, that the words, "This is My body broken for you," "This cup is the New Covenant in My blood," bore their deep meaning in the orderly observance of the Lord's Supper as a sacrament.

The Gentile churches, neither held by Jewish custom nor familiar with Hebrew ways of thinking, used a liberty in developing their worship and conducting their affairs which unfortunately sometimes passed into licence. But the distinctive features of Christianity as a cultus took form among them. The custom of observing the first day of the week as that of assembly and fellowship could not, in Judæa, supersede the old Sabbath law. The Gospel of St. John supplies evidence that, between the resurrection and ascension of our Lord, the disciples met on the first day of the week, and this was the starting-point of the new order. There is, however, no other notice of its use among the Christians of Palestine during the apostolic age. But as the separation between Christians and Jews became an object in "the parts of the Gentiles," the

change of the day of assembly was of great importance. At Tarsus St. Paul waited seven days, in order that he might be present with the disciples on the first day of the week, when they "came together to break bread." Writing to the Corinthians, he counselled them to make their treasuring of money for the help of the poor brethren on the first day of the week. No distinct injunctions or notes of an invariable practice mark the institution of the "Lord's day." It was, however, sufficiently commended, not only as distinct from the Jewish day of rest, but also as the day of the resurrection. St. Paul declares once and again that for Christians the Jewish Sabbath, with other forms of the ceremonial law, had been left behind. The pharisaical rules of Sabbath-keeping were alien from the new freedom he found in Christianity. In no sense, therefore, does he countenance formality or rigidity in the observance of the first day of the week. Religious communion and worship were spontaneously engaged in by Christians on that day. Yet the need of a day of rest was too pressing to be neglected, and the use of the Sabbath for the highest ends, for the culture of the spiritual life and for works of mercy, flowed from the whole spirit of the Christian religion. Old Testament sanctions of Sabbath-keeping

were accordingly transferred to the Lord's day. Christ's purpose of fulfilling the law pointed to the holy and reverent use of the day of rest; His example guarded His followers against the bigotry of the rabbis; and, whenever secular duties and the usages of society allowed, the Lord's day was devoted to the engagements of religion.

In the Gentile churches as well as the Judæo-Christian, baptism was the initiatory sacrament. The most ancient formula appears to have been—"into the name of Christ." The reception of the rite implied at first profession of faith in the Messiahship and resurrection of Jesus. Then, as more meaning was attached to His teaching and death, the creed or confession became more definite. Immersion appears to have been used on every possible occasion, though we cannot suppose it to have been exclusively practised. Reference is undoubtedly made to immersion in those passages in which burial and resurrection with Christ are declared to be symbolised by baptism. St. Paul says that in the Corinthian Church which he founded, he made no point of administering the rite. "Christ sent me," he says, "not to baptize, but to preach the gospel." A few had for some reason received baptism at his hands in Corinth; but he recalled with satis-

faction that they were few, when he found the abuse of ordinances becoming a scandal to Christianity. Nevertheless, baptism was from the first the sign of the new faith and hope, the seal of union with the Lord; and language was used, as in 1 Peter iii. 21, attributing very great significance to it. The love of symbol which had grown up under Judaism was sparingly provided for by Christian rites; and therefore those instituted had the greater importance and sacredness. In Titus iii. 5, baptism is the "washing of regeneration." In 1 John v. 6, reference is made to it in the singular statement regarding Christ, who is, in believers, the overcoming power: "This is He that came by water and blood, even Jesus Christ; not with the water only, but with the water and with the blood." Afterwards the apostle says: "There are three who bear witness, the Spirit, and the water, and the blood; and the three agree in one." The baptismal formula preserved in St. Matt. xxviii. 19, was brought into use at an early date.

The Lord's Supper, commemorating Christ's death and pointing forward to His second advent, was, we have seen, an observance of the Church from its beginning. The command of Christ, "Do this in remembrance of Me," could not be forgotten by those who sat at the table with Him

that night on which He was betrayed, and received from His hands the symbolic bread and wine. The words used by our Lord in the institution of the sacrament are variously reported in Matthew, Mark, and Luke; and there is verbal difference even between the last of these accounts and that given by St. Paul in 1 Cor. xi. 23 *ff.* This passage has the clearest marks of having been made circumstantially accurate, in order to meet the new sense of the importance of the sacrament. The observance had been properly associated with a common meal, or *agape*. According to St. Paul's account, the bread blessed by our Lord was that used in the *δεῖπνον*, or supper, and at the close of supper the wine was blessed and distributed. The *agape* was therefore required, or was, at all events, in perfect keeping with the original form of the ordinance. No warrant whatsoever is to be found for the precautions and sacerdotal regulations afterwards brought into use. The broken bread, passed from hand to hand and partaken of by all, symbolises the broken body of Him who declared Himself to be the Bread of Life. The wine is the symbol of His blood. That He gave Himself for the salvation of men, that a new relation or covenant is established between God and men by His death, that there is

spiritual union with Him, participation of His grace and life by those who eat and drink in faith, that communicants are solemnly pledged to His service and to the hope of His return in power,—these are the connotations of the holy sacrament.

The fellowship of Christians, beginning with baptism and sustained by prayer, and by the *agape* and the Lord's Supper, brought intellectual and practical enlargement. It was fellowship in thought as well as in love and in good works. The discourses of the apostles, evangelists, prophets, and elders, unfolded the meaning of the words of Christ, His sufferings, atonement, and resurrection, explained His relation to the Father, the nature of His salvation, the promise of His second coming. Those who met in the Christian assemblies had education in reasoning and the formation of opinion. The apostolic writings, culminating in the Epistle to the Romans, made appeal to the intellect as well as to the spiritual feeling of all to whom they were addressed. Writing to the Corinthians, Paul complains that he has had to feed them with milk, not with meat; but his aim was so to instruct believers that they might be rooted and builded up in Christ, and established in their faith (Col. ii. 7). With St. Paul as their chief

guide in thought, the evangelists and other teachers of the Gentile churches addressed themselves to the deep and difficult questions of the Christian religion. And there was need of all available knowledge and skill in dialectic, for very soon the gospel had to bear the brunt of many attacks.

Side by side with the intellectual discipline, however, went another, that of love and good works; and in this, more than the former, Christians enjoyed the finest blessing of their fellowship. The love of Christ was their inspiration in generous effort for the poor, the afflicted, the ignorant, the lost. The fruit of the Spirit among them was "love, joy, peace, long-suffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, meekness, temperance," against which there was no law (Gal. v. 22 *f.*). They were taught to love one another with a pure heart fervently, to do good to all, especially to those who were of the household of faith. On the whole, the culture of unselfishness, of what we now call altruism, distinguished the Christians. In kindness to one another, and quick response to every call of human need, they surpassed all the brotherhoods of the age. Although their minds were not set on earthly comforts or rewards, yet they were the most faithful in service, the most devoted in

friendship, the most sympathetic with the sorrowful, and generous to the poor.

Before Christianity began to spread among the Gentiles, the need of friendly association among those who lay under the neglect of the Roman empire, and had no interest in its vast prosperity, had been met by clubs (*sodalitates*), partly held together by religious rites. These were composed of obscure persons (*tenuiores*), and were of the nature of benefit and funeral societies. Within their circles the freeman and the slave were equal, and their secret meetings were greatly enjoyed. But they were proscribed by law; and the Christian societies, resembling them in some respects, came under the suspicion which they excited. There can be no doubt that the churches of Christ, as they spread over the empire, found the way in great measure prepared for them by those other associations, and won acceptance in providing a true religion, a finer brotherliness, and a better hope. Now at last the longings of the soul could be satisfied, the lonely and sad could breathe the air of home.

3. We pass now to the idea of the *Church*, as it appears in the apostolic writings.

With one Lord, one faith, one baptism, believers may be said to have constituted from



the first one body, one Church. The desire for unity was in the minds of Paul and Barnabas, and the disciples of Antioch when they made appeal to the apostles and elders in Jerusalem. These, again, showed the same desire when they came to the decision announced by James. While the practice in Jerusalem differed much from that of the new Gentile churches, the need of a common understanding was acknowledged. Yet the Judæan churches seem afterwards to have gone their own way and left Gentile Christians to adopt such forms of worship and belief as they pleased. The interference of the Judaising party with the churches of Galatia and the work of St. Paul was not sanctioned by the apostles and elders in Jerusalem. It was essentially schismatic and lawless. The general scheme of doctrine and observance established under the administration of St. Paul was not challenged by his brethren. There is good reason to believe that the responsible leaders of the Judæan Church followed with deep interest and almost unbroken approval the inspired interpretation of Christianity which St. Paul gave in his epistles. Of the agreement of St. Peter and St. John with their brother apostle we have clear evidence.

There were, nevertheless, two distinct streams

in the current of Christian thought and worship; and these for a time parted so widely that complete separation might have been looked for. Towards the close of St. Paul's ministry the Judæo-Christian churches and those mainly Gentile—the former clinging to the temple-worship and the Mosaic law interpreted in the light of Christ's Messiahship, the latter striking boldly into the freedom of the dispensation of the Spirit—were so far asunder, that some modern differences separating churches from each other, that for instance between Episcopacy and Presbyterianism, are moderate by comparison. And it was in full view of this divergence that St. Paul stated his doctrine of the unity of the Church in the form it has in his latest epistles. While there was little communication between the two sections—while in the one circumcision, cleansings, even sacrifices, were *de rigueur*, and Christ as the Messiah was expected to give spiritual dominion to Israel; and in the other the Mosaic rites generally were refused as “weak and beggarly rudiments,” and Israel almost disappeared as a nationality from the Christian horizon—St. Paul spoke of the Church as the one body of Christ, described it as “the pillar and ground of the truth” (1 Tim. iii. 15), as the “*πλήρωμα* of Him who filleth all in all.” With

large charity he allowed to Hebrews their strong conservatism; and he was able to affirm the substantial unity, in faith, in testimony, and in fruit-bearing, of both sections of the Christian republic. Christ, he said, had created of the twain, that is, of Jew and Gentile, one new humanity, so making peace (Eph. ii. 15). Whether Hebrew Christians realised it or not, the law of commandments had been abolished, and through Christ the believer who still followed the old Jewish way, and the Gentile to whom Christ was the new and only way, alike enjoyed access in one Spirit unto the Father. The commonwealth of Israel (Eph. ii. 12) was still for Paul, and also for many who were once far off from God, something to be identified with; and the Judean churches had a special part in the witness-bearing which was to be extended throughout the world.

The unity of the Church, as Paul saw it, was certainly no formal unity, no unity maintained by a central government, apostolic, presbyterial, or episcopal. Such an authority did not exist. Those who talk of schism and of rending the garment of Christ, and appeal to the words of St. Paul against that dreadful crime, forget entirely the circumstances under which he wrote. There was no distinct creed or confession of

faith for the whole Church, no uniform discipline. The Christians in any city, such as Ephesus, Philippi, Rome, were only feeling their way first towards agreement among themselves, then towards a larger harmony with others. No doubt the epistles of St. Paul and the other apostles, handed from church to church, were promoting unity both in creed and observance. Yet they did not lay down rules to be invariably followed. Counsel given to the churches reflected the freedom of the apostle's thought, and also left room for Christian liberty in the churches addressed. For mere outward agreement or uniformity was not an object either to St. Paul, St. Peter, or St. John. It was an afterthought in Christianity. Where the Spirit of the Lord was, there was liberty, and without the Spirit rules and subordination to rules would only create a new Pharisaism, the very opposite of real life. The solidarity of the Church, therefore, was to be compatible with the freedom of each society in guiding its affairs according to the mind of Christ, the spontaneity of each faithful elder and deacon, the enthusiastic desire to serve God in his own way of each member of the Church. There were diversities of gifts, of ministrations, of workings, but to each one was given the mani-

festation of the Spirit to profit withal (1 Cor. xii. 6, 7). Christ was the Head of His body the Church, the Head of each church; and His Headship implied a catholic faith, a broad unity. But He was also the Head of each believer, the Light of each life. One might interpret the Lord's words, or realise His will, in a different way from another; and one man might have more light than all the others of the society to which he belonged. The revelation of truth came by a law of freedom, and was to be used freely. Christ, the Head of each life and of all the churches, being One, would provide by His Spirit for their unity; and everywhere the law of love was to prevail, love which suffers long and is kind, which beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things (1 Cor. xiii.).

The idea of unity which in a few centuries began to fetter the Church was in complete contrast to that which Paul set forth. It sprang from the centralisation of authority, the dictation of officials, the desire to ape in a world-wide Church the imperialism of Rome. Monarchical government of prelates in great sees; decision often gained by bare majorities, or secured by dishonourable expedients in councils of bishops; patriarchal or archiepiscopal administration; and

finally, the rule of the bishop of Rome—these were steps in a process which St. Paul for one would have viewed with horror. The sects, so called, in Protestantism, condemned as they are by those whose sympathies are ecclesiastical rather than Christian or human, show in their number and vitality the freedom that happily survives, the operation of the Spirit, whose fire the new legalism has not been able to quench. All the unity Christendom needs may co-exist with our present divisions;—and, in fact, the only schismatics are those who deny the law of love, standing proudly apart from brethren who draw their life from the Divine Head, and labour to do His will and extend His glorious kingdom.

## CHAPTER VII.

### THE CONCILIATION OF ISRAEL.

WITH the spread of Christianity among the Gentiles, the future of Israel as a nation ceased to be of immediate practical importance in the outlook of the Church. The prophecies of the Old Testament regarding the destiny of Israel were not forgotten ; but the evangelisation of the heathen world was the great talk of the time, and the centre of activity soon moved so far to the west that events in Palestine had little effect on Christianity. This, however, did not imply that the Hebrew element in the Church was losing importance. The Israelites in Judæa, and those scattered through the churches in Asia, Greece, Egypt, and Italy, formed no small proportion of the believers in Christ ; and their mental vigour and religious spirit gave them great weight.

Now it seemed absolutely necessary to the

success of the gospel that the Hebrew Christians should exhibit a cordial union with the converts from heathenism, and in Palestine especially should not only remain true to the faith, but renounce those ideas and customs, inherited from the fathers, by which the free development of Christianity was hindered. And none acquainted with Judaism, aware how strong a hold it had on the children of Abraham, could fail to see the gravity of the situation. We do not wonder, accordingly, to find a treatise so important as the Epistle to the Hebrews devoted to the questions that arose out of it.

There is reason to believe that in the Gentile churches, after the failure of the Judaising sect, those of Hebrew birth who became Christians were on the whole on good accord with their new brethren. Attempts that were made to graft on Christianity the fables and angel-worship of Judaistic gnosticism may have had more success among the Hebrew converts than among those who had been originally heathens. Yet, generally speaking, after St. Paul's vindication of the gospel from the ceremonial law, things appear to have moved towards harmony. The middle wall of partition between Jew and Gentile was broken down, and their fellowship in faith and hope must have been made cordial



to no small extent by the tenor of the Epistle to the Romans and others from the pen of St. Paul. It was an argument of great force, that the Abrahamic covenant, which preceded the law and was founded on faith, had its fulfilment in the catholic salvation of the gospel. Reassuring to Hebrews was the promise that, while blindness in part had befallen Israel, yet, when the fulness of the Gentiles was come in, "all Israel should be saved"—to the great enrichment of the Church. No man could speak more strongly in honour of Israel, or show more desire for its redemption, than he whom unbelieving Jews branded as an enemy of their country and a traitor to their faith. The pathetic words must have gone to the heart of many a Jew: "I could wish that myself were anathema from Christ for my brethren's sake, my kinsmen according to the flesh . . . My heart's desire and my supplication to God for them is that they may be saved." And there was a doctrine which had still more weight in confirming Hebrew converts—the doctrine of the election. Returning to the words of Isaiah, "If the number of the children of Israel be as the sand of the sea, it is the remnant that shall be saved," Paul identified with that remnant the Israelites who believed in Christ "according to the election

of grace" (Rom. ix. 27, xi. 5). To them it was no loss of position to become members of the Church of Christ, but a distinction, the enjoyment of a closer relation to God than Israel as a people ever had. The Jewish sense of superiority to others could no longer be maintained; but here was a higher privilege. Those who were in Christ were the elect of all nations and all time, objects of that Divine grace, to the revelation of which the whole of prophecy looked forward.

Yet the reconciliation of Hebrews to their Gentile fellow-believers and to the new order of things, carried so far by St. Paul, was by no means complete. He had touched on many points that aided faith, but nothing had been said about the priesthood, the temple, the sacrifices, the altar. It was true these belonged to a system which had come in long after the Abrahamic covenant; still they were of Divine institution. Was Moses to be set aside entirely, and the whole system of worship associated with his name to have no place or recollection even as symbolism? Surely the sanctuary, made according to a pattern which Moses saw in the holy mount, had some spiritual analogue, and the sacrifices were not without a significance that ought to be preserved? We can believe that

Christian Jews spoke in this way; and the epistles we now consider were fitted to meet in some degree the inquiries that such men could not help pursuing.

Throughout his epistles St. Paul never once mentioned the priesthood; nor, as we have seen, did he trace any analogy between the sacrifices of the temple and the oblation of Christ. Although he spoke of the blood of Christ in accordance with our Lord's own language, when instituting the sacrament of the Supper and elsewhere, he drew no contrast or comparison between the shedding of Christ's blood and the sprinkling or pouring out of the blood of sacrificed animals. These and other points suggested by the Mosaic ritual he seems deliberately to have avoided. There can be little doubt that, while St. Peter wrote in careful harmony with the teaching of his brother apostle, he aimed at supplementing what St. Paul had written. The Epistle to the Hebrews, however, is the full exposition of the analogies and contrasts which interested Jewish Christians. The writer, aware of the need for such a discussion, addressed himself with fine enthusiasm and great dialectic power to the whole subject, at once so inviting and so beset with difficulties.

The First Epistle of Peter is generally believed

to have been written about A.D. 64, and there may seem no conclusive reasons for placing it at a later date. Professor Ramsay argues that the imperial law of Rome had not, till ten or twelve years later, pronounced decisively against Christianity and made adherence to the Name of Christ a capital offence; and he holds that the Epistle assumes a statute of this nature. Yet here and there heathen enthusiasts may have been anticipating the law in attempts to suppress the new faith, and may have in certain cases enlisted Roman officials in the work of persecution. This may be all that is implied at ch. iii. 15, and iv. 14 *ff.* It is doubtful, too, whether the expression "your adversary the devil" certainly means the hostile State. It may equally well be held to indicate the spirit of heathenism. Still Professor Ramsay's acute and careful arguments<sup>1</sup> for a date as late as A.D. 75–80 must be allowed on the whole to be almost conclusive. If we add to them the further significant considerations, that even for St. Peter the Mosaic law and ritual have fallen entirely into the background, and that he makes no reference to the temple and temple worship as existing, we have good reason to believe that, when he wrote, the fall of Jerusalem was a thing

<sup>1</sup> *The Church in the Roman Empire*, p. 279 *ff.*

of the past. There is a marked difference between the way in which St. Peter touches on Mosaism, and the discussion of the subject in the Epistle to the Hebrews. The latter unquestionably precedes the destruction of Jerusalem; the former appears to have followed it.

Written by one thoroughly acquainted with Judaism, an Israelite apparently by birth, although Greek was his mother tongue, the Epistle to the Hebrews seems to have been addressed from Rome to the churches in Judæa, and particularly to that of Jerusalem. The writer founds on the Old Testament, which he knows in the Septuagint version, and he uses every Messianic passage that falls in with his purpose, in no case interrupting his argument to prove that the reference must be to the Messiah. He rests with equal confidence on the writings of St. Paul. With the Epistles to the Colossians, Ephesians, and Philippians before him, he speaks of the humiliation and exaltation of Christ, His part in creation, and His universal dominion, adopting as acknowledged truths many doctrines of those epistles. He assumes that the Hebrews to whom he writes are already well instructed in apostolic teaching, and proceeds on that basis to show the superiority, in every sense, of Christianity to the Mosaic system.

It may be a question whether the Christian Hebrews of Judæa had given as much attention as the author presupposes to the writings of St. Paul. If the Epistle of James is to be taken as indicating the state of belief a few years previous to the publication of Hebrews, there had scarcely been sufficient preparation for the bold arguments of this apology. For instance, James says nothing of the Divine Sonship of Christ, which the new writer assumes at the outset; nor does the Epistle of James refer to the Godhead of the Holy Spirit. The writer to the Hebrews is full of enthusiasm for the religion of Christ, which he has embraced with intense faith and studied with every possible aid. He takes for granted that the Hebrew Christians of Judæa are as forward in knowledge as those in Rome, with whom he has discussed the topics of his treatise. If he is mistaken in this, the error is a generous one, and it has made his epistle one of the precious legacies of the apostolic age.

The aim of the writing as a whole is to revive and place on sure ground the faith of Hebrew believers, who were in danger of renouncing Christ under the continual pressure brought to bear on them by those of the old religion. The persecution of Paul in Jerusalem was of a

peculiar bitterness; yet we may take it as certain that all who left Judaism for Christ became marked men, against whom everything within the limits of Roman law was done by way of service to God. James, the Lord's brother, conforming devoutly to the Mosaic ritual, was for a long time unmolested. Many, however, who followed him in the observance of Hebrew rites, were without his firm faith in Christ; and these were in danger of "drifting away" from the things they had heard. The fascination of the venerable system, which they felt the more in attempting to resist it, tended to draw them into the back-flowing tide. Patriotic feeling and family influences, too, were strongly against them. The writer of our epistle shows them how much they would lose, what fearful condemnation they would bring on themselves, if they yielded. Neither should entreaty nor persecution be allowed to sever them from Christ, for to renounce their faith in Him would be to repeat the dreadful act of crucifixion, and put Him to open shame again. If choice was difficult because much they valued would be lost, because a Divine system sanctified by ages of holy use could not be given up without a pang, the epistle should prove that for everything renounced something better would be

gained—substance for shadow, spiritual purity for ceremonial cleansing, entrance into the heavenly sanctuary for a place in the temple court.

The word of the Old Covenant is first contrasted with that of the New, and it is shown that Christianity has the higher place, because the Son of God, through whom God has spoken in the end of the days, stands far above the angels. The covenant established among men by the ministration of angels must yield to that revealed by Him who is the effulgence of the Father's glory, and the very image of His substance. The dignity of Christ is not as yet fully manifest. All things, indeed, are subjected unto Him (Heb. ii. 8), but we do not see His elevation to universal dominion. He has been made a little lower than the angels, He has become a sharer of flesh and blood like those for whose deliverance He suffers. His glory and honour are in a sense veiled by what He has undergone to bring many sons unto glory. But, having made purification of sins, He has sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high; and His Divine authority gives the gospel of His salvation a claim on men which "the word spoken through angels" could not possess.

Again, He is superior to Moses, for, however faithful Moses was in the house of God, the



position of Christ is that of a Son, not of a servant. It is His gospel the Holy Ghost warns men not to reject, as Israel rejected the word of God "in the provocation, in the day of the temptation in the wilderness." The incompleteness of the deliverance which Moses began and Joshua continued, was shown in this, that the people they led never entered into rest. The true Sabbath rest remains to be enjoyed; and all must give diligence to enter into it, through obedience to the word of Christ.

The subject of the priesthood is next fully discussed, and the doctrine taught that Jesus is the one great Priest. He was made like unto His brethren, that He might be merciful and faithful in His office, and that He might "make propitiation for the sins of the people" (ch. ii. 17). To fulfil the duties of His priesthood, He has passed through the heavens (ch. iv. 14). His priestly distinction is that He can be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, that He was "in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin" (ch. iv. 15); and, having been made perfect through suffering, "He became unto all them that obey Him the Author of eternal salvation" (ch. v. 9). Aaron held his office as one called to it by God; Christ also had a Divine appointment: "Thou art a priest for ever

after the order of Melchizedek." And here the higher dignity of Christ's office is clearly seen. Abraham, the father of the sons of Levi, paid tithes to Melchizedek; one made a Priest after that order stands, therefore, above the Levitical priests descended from Abraham. He is also a priest "for ever," not made "after the law of a carnal commandment, but after the power of an endless life." A most sacred oath confirms Christ in office: "The Lord sware and will not repent Himself"; and this declares Jesus to be "the surety of a better covenant." While the Aaronic priests could not continue by reason of death, He hath His priesthood unchangeable; He ever liveth to make intercession for them that draw near unto God through Him. He has no need to offer daily sacrifices like the Levitical priests, who, themselves sinful, brought offerings that could not, as touching the conscience, make the worshipper perfect (ch. ix. 9). "Christ having come a High Priest of the good things to come, not through the blood of goats and calves, but through His own blood, entered in once for all into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption."

Again, as to the sanctuary in which the worship of the Old Covenant was conducted, it was only "a copy and shadow" of the true

tabernacle of which Christ is minister. The arrangements of the earthly sanctuary, with its Holy Place and Holy of Holies, belonged to a provisional system, which, according to the promise of a New Covenant (ch. viii. 13), was to be superseded. The way into the true Holy Place, the heavenly sanctuary, had not been made manifest while the first tabernacle was still standing. The sprinkling of sacrificial blood on the book of the covenant, the people, the tabernacle, and all the vessels of the ministry, was a means of cleansing meet enough for "copies of the things in the heavens"; but the heavenly things themselves are cleansed with better sacrifices than these. "Once at the end of the ages hath Christ been manifested, to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself." By the whole argument readers are pointed from symbolic things and purifications to spiritual realities, and an availing oblation.

Further, the faith of Old Testament believers is spoken of in the highest terms of praise; but it is shown that the promises on which they based their hope had never been fulfilled. They "received not the promise, God having provided some better thing concerning us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect." Believers in Christ receive a kingdom that shall not be

shaken ; “ they come unto Mount ‘Zion and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem.” They have to go forth unto Jesus without the camp, bearing the reproach of His cross ; but He who brought again from the dead the great Shepherd of the sheep, with the blood of the eternal covenant, will make them perfect in every good thing to do His will.

These are some of the arguments of a daring epistle, which conveys also many exhortations and warnings fitted to revive the fidelity of the Hebrew Christians. It reached Jerusalem, however—perhaps about A.D. 69—at a time when those for whom it was designed could not fully profit by its eloquent reasoning. The trouble and terror of the judgment day of Judaism were upon them. Soon afterwards the confusion of an unparalleled civil strife reached its climax, and the advance of the Roman army upon Jerusalem was the signal of flight for all Christians. In the privations and dangers of the dispersion, Hebrew Christianity kept its light burning, but did little more. The epistle which might have done much for the faith of the remnant, had to wait for appreciation until in other circumstances a new generation could profit by the truth. Outside Palestine, however, it was accepted and valued.

The First Epistle of Peter, to which we now turn, is addressed to the sojourners of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia. The writer has clearly in view the Hebrew Christians, who are, according to St. Paul's doctrine of the election of grace, chosen from among the Israelites, as Israel was formerly separated from the Gentiles. For St. Peter, these Hebrew Christians constitute the nucleus of the Church, and to them heathens who believe are joined by baptism. In this conception of the Christian theocracy Peter adopts the Pauline doctrine of the election, but with his own interpretation. The sense of Hebrew birthright survives, as we might expect; yet it is held in harmony with a catholic gospel. The epistle, beginning with this hint of Israel's priority, is not written for Hebrews alone. The utmost care is taken that there shall not be one word offensive to Gentile Christians, and that they shall be included in the promises and enjoy the hopes which belong to the elect race.

The epistle is addressed to the Galatian churches along with others; and some reference might have been expected to the ceremonial law in its relation to the observances and worship of Christianity. Following St. Paul, it might

have seemed fit that St. Peter should give his view of the quarrel which had once distracted Galatia. But it is entirely left behind. Not a word is said of the differences which Hebrew Christians once had, either among themselves or with the Jews who did not believe in Christ. Peter stirs no disputation, old or new ; Christians could pray, could hope, could rejoice in Christ, though the temple and its sacrifices were things of the past. The apostle has realised that the position of a believer in Christ is far higher than that of an Israelite. The prophets of the Old Testament sought and searched diligently in their day for a salvation that was to come. Christians could rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory, receiving the end of their faith, even the salvation of their souls. Bright indeed was the prospect which the faith of Christ brought with it. Peter with the rest of the apostles had once looked for a revival of Israel's prosperity as a nation. They hoped to see the Holy Land cleared of Roman troops and unbelieving Gentiles, ruled by the Messiah as a King, extending its influence over many nations. But what is the Christian view, as it now opens before the eye of faith ? It is the hope of an "inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, that fadeth not away ; reserved in heaven for those who are kept by the power

of God through faith unto salvation." And how is that salvation effected? Isaiah said: "All we like sheep have gone astray; and the Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all." That was indeed fulfilled. "Ye were going astray like sheep, but are now returned unto the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls" (ch. ii. 25). The Jewish sacrifices brought worshippers to a dumb oracle. There was a blank after the atonement was made. A man cleansed from his defilement, the crowd on the great Day of Atonement after the blood was sprinkled, heard the words of forgiveness, and went away feeling no real change in their relation to God. But the sufferings of Christ for men gave them a living Friend and Helper. Peter remembered Him well—that Jesus "who did no sin, neither was guile found in His mouth; who, when He was reviled, reviled not again; when He suffered, threatened not" (ch. ii. 22 *f.*). Though the Christians in Galatia and throughout the world had not seen this Saviour, they yet loved Him. In Him, though He remained invisible, they could believe; and when they believed they died unto sin, and lived unto righteousness (ch. ii. 24). Their standing in the new order of things was that they were chosen to be a people for God's own possession, that they "might show forth the praises of Him who

had called them out of darkness unto His marvellous light."

Most interesting to us, in the track of thought we are now following, are the ideas taken across from Jewish worship and employed in the epistle to illustrate Christian truth.

The idea of *priesthood* is one, and it is used in another way than in the Epistle to the Hebrews. There the main contention is that Christ is the only Priest in the spiritual dispensation; and although believers are called to offer up the continual sacrifice of praise, they are never spoken of as priests. St. Peter, by no means opposing this doctrine of the sole priesthood of Christ, prefers to say that He suffered for sins, that He bare our sins in His own body upon the tree, and speaks of Him not as a priest but as the Shepherd of our souls. The priesthood of this epistle is that which all Christians exercise. They are a "holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God through Jesus Christ" (ch. ii. 5); they are "a royal priesthood." The application of the word in this way implies that the ancient system of propitiation, and the law which made those entitled to offer sacrifices an order by themselves, have been superseded. There is no longer a priesthood of the house of Aaron; for spiritual



sacrifices—of praise, thanksgiving, devotion—are to be offered by all. Human priesthood has this meaning, according to the epistles, and it has no other. Nearest to the Jewish standpoint of all the apostles who have left important doctrinal writings, Peter might have been expected to retain, with the name *priest*, some of the old sacerdotal functions, and to reserve such for the official ministers of the Church. If he had seen any need for them—if, for instance, he had seen that there should be an offering of the bread and wine of the Lord's Supper at an altar by way of sacrifice—he would certainly have referred to it. But he dismisses everything of the kind; and the other New Testament writers are in complete harmony with him. "The priestly functions and privileges of the Christian people are never regarded as transferred or even delegated to the officers of the Church. They are called stewards or messengers of God, servants or ministers of the Church, and the like; but the sacerdotal title is never once conferred upon them. The only priests under the gospel, designated as such in the New Testament, are the saints, the members of the Christian brotherhood."<sup>1</sup>

The next expression we notice, is that in

<sup>1</sup> Lightfoot, *Dissertations on the Apostolic Age*, p. 141.

ch. i. 2, "sprinkling of the blood of Christ." The ceremony of sprinkling the blood of sacrificed animals upon the people was used in ratification of the covenant made by God with Israel. "Moses took the blood, and sprinkled it on the people, and said, Behold the blood of the covenant, which the Lord hath made with you concerning all these words" (Ex. xxiv. 8). One-half of the blood was sprinkled on the altar, one-half on the people. It was a singular ceremony, an impressive ceremony, suited to the time and occasion, full of significance for those who believed that the blood of man or animal was the life. It meant a vital relationship between Jehovah and Israel; it implied that the life of Israel depended on obedience to the covenant, that to abjure the covenant was to die. The same ceremony of sprinkling the blood of a sacrifice was often used, as in the consecration of Aaron and his sons to the priestly office described in Lev. viii.: "Moses took of the anointing oil, and of the blood which was upon the altar, and sprinkled it upon Aaron, and upon his garments, and upon his sons, and upon his sons' garments with him." In this and other ceremonies the sprinkling of the blood meant cleansing. A priest on whom the blood was sprinkled was fitted for holy service. One

who had been unclean was restored to ceremonial purity when the blood of his sacrifice had touched him.

Now the use of the figure by St. Peter, as also in the Epistle to the Hebrews, refers to these ceremonies. For the Old Covenant made with Israel there is a New Covenant, and Christians are chosen to enjoy its privileges. Their faith and pledge of obedience are ratified as if by the sprinkling of blood. Christians are also to be a priesthood; and their purification for this office and privilege, the taking away of the defilement of their sin, are denoted by the sprinkling of the blood of Jesus.

But how? In what sense? There is an element of fact, an element of figure. The fact was that Jesus had died, that His death had been by violence, so that His blood was poured forth. He Himself said that His blood was to be shed for the remission of sins. The death by violence, the shedding of blood, made the offering of Christ upon the cross appear like one of the sacrifices of the Old Testament, the blood of which was sprinkled on the altar and on the worshippers. This is the one side.

Yet when St. Peter speaks of the sprinkling of the blood of Christ, the expression is figurative. The old usage becomes a symbol. For the blood

of Christ was not actually sprinkled on those who stood about the cross. The meaning is, that Christ, in giving Himself to a violent death for men, binds them to Himself and to God; that His death is a propitiation of which the power is felt by faith—as if the blood were actually applied to the body; that the effect of His death, realised by faith, is to consecrate the life. There is a transition from the physical to the spiritual, at the point where the fact of Christ's death becomes significant of God's purpose and will, which enter into the life of the soul. The idea is similar to that which the Old Testament practice conveyed, but it is in a higher range. Now the soul, the will, the whole being, are consecrated. There is no ceremony corresponding to the sprinkling of blood. Baptism does not represent this; for it continues a symbolic usage, which existed along with the sprinkling of blood. Purification comes through faith, and through realisation of the grace of God; reception of Christ, as made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption, the enduement of the Holy Spirit.

Once more, the idea of redemption is taken across by St. Peter from the Old Testament: "Ye were redeemed not with corruptible things,

with silver or gold, from your vain manner of life handed down from your fathers, but with precious blood, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot, even the blood of Christ" (ch. i. 18 *f.*). Here, entirely in harmony with previous use of the symbol, the deliverance of Israel is recalled, and also the rite of redemption or ransom of the first-born which was closely connected with that deliverance.

The redemption from Egyptian bondage was an event of the first importance in Israel's history, and everything associated with it entered deeply into the thought and religion of the nation. A Deuteronomic statute was: "Thou shalt remember that thou wast a bondsman in the land of Egypt, and Jehovah thy God redeemed thee," and the psalms and prophecies have many references to that signal mark of Divine favour. God was the Redeemer of Israel because He had wrought this deliverance for His people; and they were confident He would always in like manner intervene for their help. "Fear not, O Israel, for I have redeemed thee; I have called thee by thy name; thou art Mine." "He shall redeem Israel from all their iniquities."

Now, with the redemption from Egypt was associated the institution of the passover and

the slaying in each house of the paschal lamb ; and to this St. Peter refers : " Ye were redeemed with precious blood, as of a lamb without blemish "—following Paul, who says : " Our pass-over also hath been sacrificed, even Christ " (1 Cor. v. 7). History told that the blood of the lamb was sprinkled by the Hebrews on the door-posts and lintels of their houses, on the night of the destruction of the first-born in Egypt. To this the figure as used by St. Peter apparently returns. The same God, whose gracious intervention rescued their fathers, was now the Redeemer of His elect people from their vain manner of life. The blood of the true Paschal Lamb, spiritually without spot or blame, is the efficient means of this holy deliverance.

With this reference, however, another is interwoven, which implies a point of contrast to Old Testament usage. In the Book of Numbers the redemption of the first-born of each household in Israel is partly by the substitution of the Levites, who are dedicated to holy service. But a certain number of first-born sons, beyond the available Levites, are redeemed with the payment of a specified sum into the sacred treasury. Not in this way, by corruptible things such as silver and gold, are any redeemed under the New

Covenant. The precious blood of Christ has virtue enough for all.

Those uses of Hebrew symbolism by St. Peter, and still more his reliance upon the Christian salvation, apart from any thought of special right or privilege belonging to the children of Abraham, the circumcised, the faithful keepers of the law, must have had immense influence for good. This was the manifesto of one who had once stood in opposition to Paul, doubtful of Christian freedom ; and it was in accord with all that the Apostle of the Gentiles had said. Judaism is past, the temple is nothing, its sacrifices are symbols—Christ remains. He is the continual sacrifice, the chief corner-stone, the example of suffering, the leader of activity, the Shepherd and Overseer of life. In all things God is to be glorified, through Jesus Christ.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### DISORDERS AND HERESIES.

THE apostolic churches were far from ideal, either in their discipline or spiritual state. Already we have seen the lapse from Christian freedom and faith, which had to be counteracted by St. Paul's Epistle to the Galatians; and this was one of many errors which caused no small anxiety and division. For life there must be liberty; and the religious life, under the conditions then existing, was in constant peril of abusing the liberty that is in Christ. Influences outside Christianity, and often opposed to it, were rooted in the soil of heathen thought, and poisoned the atmosphere. The turmoil of conflicting ideas had never been greater in the world's history than at the time when the gospel made its appeal to the human mind; and of all the theatres of speculation none were filled with more eager controversy than those in the region



first evangelised, from Syria to Italy. Antioch on the Orontes, Ephesus, Thyatira, and the other Asian cities, Philippi, Thessalonica, Corinth, Athens, Rome—in each of these, immemorial custom fought with novel schemes of life, brutality with civilisation, falsehood with truth, superstition with philosophy, vehement denial with zealous belief. Moving westward in the track of empire, a whole tribe of oriental notions, fresh to the Roman world, sought new settlements, found hospitality, and increased the ferment of thought. The Christians, with awakened minds, eager to learn and live, heard what was said, but were often unable to discriminate, intermeddled with all knowledge, and were too ready to bow to the show of argument. Heathen vices clung to many of them; and others, though sincerely converted, were still ignorant and credulous. The new importance found in the Christian societies by men of obscure birth and low rank often developed an egotism, the exhibitions of which were irritating and alarming. In the companies of persons, mostly poor, who composed the churches, the few who had wealth were conspicuous and received deference out of proportion to their piety or wisdom. On the whole, it may be said that the faith of Christ had at this time to pass through an ordeal, the strenu-

ousness of which can hardly be repeated. Christianity emerged with all its power to regenerate human life; and we have full warrant for our confidence, that whatever may be done in the future to destroy it will be overcome by the power of that Spirit whose Divine energy was its salvation in the early days.

Glancing over the apostolic churches, we are arrested almost immediately by the condition of the church in Corinth. The two epistles addressed to it, their length and fulness of reference, give that church more importance than any other in the field of our present inquiry. It would be wrong to assume that elsewhere the Christian societies were in the same disorder as at Corinth, where the gravity of the position required the sustained efforts of St. Paul. Other churches had less of his counsel, probably because they needed less. The city of Corinth, standing midway between Asia and Italy, was peculiarly disturbed by the unrest of the age. It was a rendezvous of people of the adventurous sort from east and west. With the endless streams of travellers, military men, merchants, fortune-seekers, flowing towards Rome, or from it, went currents of opinion and desire that ploughed deeply into the soil. Beset with difficulties, the work of the gospel in church had been success-

ful. St. Paul had given to it his best energy, Apollos his learning and fervour; and the church had become large. But the weeds of heathen vice grew apace among the good seed; and the two epistles enable us to understand the state of things at a most perilous and trying time.

The spring of evil tendencies which flowed in different directions was pointed to by Paul when he wrote, "Ye are yet carnal, and walk after the manner of men." In the Church of Christ the natural fleshly manner and mind should no longer prevail; in an ideal congregation they would never appear. Of these come jealousy, strife, pride, the assumption of wisdom. Slaves brought up in the mews of Corinth, poor labourers and handicraftsmen to whom the gospel had brought the first dream of life, found themselves members of a free community; but the dominion of the lower nature was not destroyed by the change. They were instructed by self-installed teachers of Christian truth, men who were still ignorant and proud. St. Paul did not hesitate to tell those teachers how faulty their work was, and to rebuke the conceit of their converts: "If any man build on the foundation wood, hay, stubble, the day shall declare it." "Already are ye filled, already are ye become rich, ye have reigned without us." "If any man

thinketh that he is wise, let him become a fool that he may be wise." These are sharp sarcastic sayings; but the circumstances called for them.

For the evils to be dealt with were not on the surface. In a very short time there had come to be a daring antinomianism, which the Church allowed. The uncleanness of heathen life, kept in check in some cities by the better sort of public opinion, had in Corinth scarcely any restraint. As modern instances abundantly show, a town of rapid growth, peopled chiefly by those in quest of wealth, without associations and memories to give it dignity, is apt to be infested by persons of loose behaviour, and to take its tone from them; and such was Corinth. During the hundred years of its career under the Romans, the city had become rich and splendid; but the splendour disguised its foulness. The Christian societies held a gospel which never palliated sins of uncleanness; yet they were often too ready to accept professions of repentance, and in Corinth great evils had come of this. Men who had been admitted to the Church, after a superficial conversion, returned to their vices, and even to the practice of idolatry. In his First Epistle (ch. v. 9), St. Paul, referring to a previous letter not now extant, reminds the Corinthians of the distinction made

in it between transgressors within and outside the Church; and he proceeds: "Now I write unto you not to keep company, if any man that is named a brother be a fornicator, or covetous,<sup>1</sup> or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such a one no not to eat." The worst case was of a kind that passed beyond the ordinary vileness of Gentile life. It was that of a man who had taken his father's wife, his own stepmother. The direction regarding this offender was that the members of the church, being gathered together, should, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and acting with the full consent and spiritual influence of Paul himself, and the power of Christ, "deliver such a one unto Satan, for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus."

Some judicial punishment must have been at command for this offence. In other cases, the apostle endeavoured to counteract the antinomianism which infested the Church, by enforcing what may be called transcendental doctrine. Their bodies, he said, were members of Christ; and again: "Know ye not that your body is a temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which

<sup>1</sup> The word *πλεονέκταις* must here cover the whole ground of the Tenth Commandment, including concupiscence.

ye have from God." St. Paul held by the principle that redemption, even from fleshly sin, is through the power of high and sanctifying ideas and the indwelling Spirit of God.

Again, most unseemly exhibitions of heathen coarseness disgraced the gatherings of the Church, especially the common meal, held perhaps on the evening of every Lord's day. "There existed among the Greeks an ancient custom of holding entertainments, at which each one brought his food with him, and consumed it alone. The *agapæ* in the Corinthian Church were conducted on the plan of this ancient custom, although the peculiar object of the institution was so different; consequently the distinction of rich and poor was rendered peculiarly prominent, and the rich sometimes indulged in excesses which desecrated the character of these meetings."<sup>1</sup> As this meal closed with the observance of the Lord's Supper, bad conduct was all the more disgraceful. "In your eating, each taketh before other his own supper: and one is hungry, and another is drunken. What? have ye not houses to eat and to drink in? or despise ye the Church of God, and put them to shame that have not?" (1 Cor. xi. 21 *f.*). The rebuke here is followed by an

<sup>1</sup> Neander, *Planting and Training of the Christian Church*, p. 249.

account of the institution of the Lord's Supper, and by the solemn warning, "Whosoever shall eat the bread or drink the cup of the Lord unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and the blood of the Lord."

A heathen custom, followed by some defiantly, by others under cover of Christian freedom, caused offence in another way. At feasts given by those who were still idolaters, food which had been dedicated to the gods, not only by the opening libation, but also by actual sacrifice, was served to the guests. Of this some Christians had no scruple in partaking. It had been their habit to attend such feasts; and now, without or with consciousness of the idol, they continued to attend them. To Jewish members of the Church this was horrible; and many Gentile converts were shocked. St. Paul gives his direction: "If any man say unto you, This hath been offered in sacrifice, eat not for his sake that shewed it, and for conscience sake: conscience, I say, not thine own, but the others" (1 Cor. x. 28 *f.*). They could not, he said, partake of the table of the Lord, and of the table of devils: liberty was sacred; yet there were limits beyond which a Christian would not pass.

Such were cases in which grave scandal was caused by the manners of heathenism intruding

into the Church. But those which may be called ecclesiastical and doctrinal were even more serious; and, glancing first at the doctrinal errors, we are startled by some which appear too grave to have had a moment's tolerance. When one professing to speak under the influence of the Holy Spirit declared Jesus to be anathema, the offence was probably a singular one. Such a false prophet could have no following. We can conceive that the reference was to the death on the cross, and that, in the heat of utterance, instead of saying that Christ was made a curse, the speaker had used a word which implied actual severance from God, actual reprobation. Moreover, the blasphemous saying is connected with gross pagan errors. The ecstatic prophesying of those days, especially in Corinth, allied itself with Bacchanalian frenzy, and with the fanaticism of the priestesses of Apollo. Women with heads uncovered, their hair hanging loose, proclaimed their crude notions with most unbecoming noise. In the vehemence of half-articulate appeals to God and man, modesty, piety, and truth must have been often lost sight of. "When ye come together, each one hath a psalm, hath a teaching, hath a revelation, hath a tongue, hath an interpretation." It was a wild jangle, which might indeed



express religious eagerness, but was perilous to faith, and had to be suppressed, or at all events moderated, by wise authority.

Again, the resurrection was denied by some ; already there was a Christian Sadduceeism. How it arose cannot now be made out. The quotation from Isaiah, "Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die," which St. Paul uses ironically, has been held to show that Epicureanism had formed alliance with Christian belief. Persons disposed to that philosophy, it is imagined, may have caught the light of the gospel and been drawn into its liberating currents of thought, but yet found themselves unable to receive in any form the doctrine of the resurrection of the body. This conjecture, however, has no support in history, which throughout exhibits the Epicurean philosophy in opposition to Christian faith. Nor can the heresy be traced to Jewish converts who had been originally Sadducees ; the line of argument used by St. Paul is not that which he would have followed in dealing with Hebrew unbelievers. Those who had been led somehow to deny the resurrection must have once believed in it ; and there is no need to search far afield in order to discover a possible cause of misgiving. The dissipation of the substance of the body in cremation forbade the belief that all its parts

could be recovered and reunited. St. Paul has evidently before his mind this serious obstacle to faith when he speaks of a "spiritual body" in 1 Corinthians, and in the Second Epistle of the "building from God," which is to clothe the soul when the "earthly house of our tabernacle" is *dissolved*. Any doubt here was fatal to Christian faith and hope; and by the eloquent reasoning of 1 Cor. xv., the apostle did his utmost to overcome it. No other New Testament writer found it necessary to enter on the subject.

Turning now to the party divisions which had arisen in the Corinthian Church, we can see that they had their origin in want of thinking power and of the ability to co-ordinate different aspects of Christian truth. Some approached the gospel under the guidance of St. Paul, and followed him in the determination to know nothing but Jesus Christ and Him crucified. Probably in their desire to carry out this principle, they viewed with too much doubt the teaching of men who returned to the Old Testament for religious ideas and types, and of others who used language that savoured of the philosophy of the world. There were many points in St. Paul's teaching which could easily be magnified beyond his intention. Narrow minds attaching their faith to his distinctive forms of

expression would soon find themselves at issue with others who favoured Jewish tradition or Greek speculation. The party of Apollos, doctrinally not far removed from that of Paul, appears to have been sharply in opposition. Apollos is described, in Acts xviii. 24, as a learned man and mighty in the Scriptures. The striking features of his preaching, which had great success in Corinth, are no doubt indicated in this characterization. The brusque directness of St. Paul's address contrasted with the polish, the ease and fluency, and the wealth of allusion, which distinguished the orations of the Alexandrian. A full knowledge of the Hebrew scriptures, which he had acquired in youth, now served him well in commending the faith of God as against idolatry, and also in showing how the promises and foreshadowings of the Old Covenant had their fulfilment in Christ. Greeks who could hardly bear the vigorous dialectic of St. Paul, were attracted by the oratory and fervour of Apollos, and were led to Christianity, we may suppose, in the way he himself had reached it, by receiving first the message of John the Baptist. While Paul, taking his stand on the commission he had from Christ and his consciousness of inspiration, gave the gospel as a personal message, a Divine word with which he

was charged to the world, Apollos placed his hearers in touch with a whole series of inspired men, and with an ancient Divine system which survived in essential spiritual contents, though its day had passed. We have no difficulty in understanding how a division would thus arise. The harmony which lay beneath was not apprehended; the differences only were noticed by the less-instructed minds of the Church.

The Petrine party, again, was doubtless that which held to a certain extent the obligation of the law of Moses, not only on its moral side, but in some of its ceremonial provisions. The members of this party, we may suppose, acknowledged the mother Church of Jerusalem, and regarded Jesus more in the light of the Jewish Messiah than as the Redeemer of the world. They did not take the name of James, but were nearly in the same position as that which his epistle occupies. St. Peter, or Cephas, as they preferred to call him, had been one of the original apostles. He appeared more worthy of confidence than St. Paul. It was almost certainly at second-hand they had been informed of Peter's doctrine, perhaps by men of a sort not unlike the Judaising fanatics in Galatia. Still, if we take the objection to the eating of flesh offered to idols as proceeding from this

party, there is no reason to doubt that here, as well as at other points, the mind of Peter was expressed. The views were quite opposed to the liberal teaching of St. Paul, and those who held them were likely his most bitter critics. The sect, however, was not in circumstances favourable either to influence or growth; it was bound to decay.

The last of the four divisions called itself "of Christ," seemingly by way of exclusive claim. The epistles do not throw much light on the peculiar tenets of this sect. Perhaps some, weary of the quarrels between the adherents of Paul, of Apollos, and of Cephas, had protested against divisions in the Church by creating another. Knowing less of Christ than St. Paul, St. Peter, or even Apollos, they yet dared to claim special acquaintance with the mind of the Lord, either through the revelations of the prophets of their party, of whom there would be no lack, or by study of such fragmentary Gospels as had come into their hands. St. Paul could not very strenuously oppose the idea followed by those who called themselves "of Christ," nor could he, in so many words, discredit their prophets; and the fragmentary Gospels in circulation were most likely those of which he had availed himself. Still he doubted

the Christ party, and placed it under condemnation along with that bearing his own name. Nothing could indeed have been more dangerous than assumption of peculiar intelligence regarding the holy personality of Christ, which after eighteen centuries of study is not yet fully understood. Those were not the days, nor was Corinth the place, for a true doctrine of the Divine Word made manifest in the flesh.

We turn now to the doctrinal and moral disorders which appeared first in the Asian churches, and are touched upon chiefly in the Epistles of St. Paul addressed to them, in the Pastoral Epistles, in the First Epistle of St. John, and in the earlier part of the Apocalypse. The sources of these heretical opinions, and the lax morality associated with them, are still involved in great obscurity ; but there can be little doubt that a union of Judaism with oriental dreams, a theosophy which vainly claimed, like that of our own days, to be scientific, was the main fountain of the new notions. Too little can be gathered about them to make them interesting in themselves. They were probably introduced to the Christians in Colossæ and the neighbouring Asian towns by a single enthusiast, whose opinions were far from coherent. Untrained minds, not firmly settled into a habit of belief,

would be easily caught by the mysterious and hyper-spiritual strain of the teaching; but their applications of it would tend to hopeless confusion. Those, again, who had some learning, and were attracted by the wide sweep of the Gnostic philosophy, would differ entirely from the others in their way of blending it with Christianity. It is, therefore, useless to search for a system. When Epaphras came to Paul at Rome to consult him on the difficulties of the situation in the Colossian Church, he would be able only to indicate various points of error that had struck him in the teaching of the heresiarch, and different ways in which thought and conduct had been affected. Writing his epistle, St. Paul advanced the truth with decision and boldness against the vagaries that threatened faith. But he had no desire to attack theosophy as a scheme. His intention was rather to build up against it the Divine system of doctrine, the true philosophy of the gospel. As he met the Judaising fanatics in Galatia with a kind of new revelation of Christianity, so he could meet the gnostics with a new apocalypse. The doctrine of the person of Christ and His relation to the Father and to the universe, was Paul's refutation of theosophic teaching. His language shows that the church at Colossæ as a whole

was sound in the faith and united. What he had to do was to warn those who were in danger of being drawn away, rather than to recover the few who had lapsed.

The Judaistic strain in the false doctrine taught at Colossæ is quite apparent in Paul's references to circumcision, to "the bond written in ordinances," to meat and drink, feast days, and Sabbaths. (See ch. ii.) And it is a theosophical Judaic strain of theorising that is combated where the apostle writes: "Let no man rob you of your prize by a voluntary humility and worshipping of the angels, dwelling in the things which he hath not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind." To St. Paul it must have been quite evident that whatever claim of spirituality and unworldliness was made by the teacher at Colossæ, the ascetic rules, the severity to the body, which he enjoined as necessary to the higher life, covered real grossness of nature, a tendency to sensual indulgence. (Ch. ii. 23.) The restraint professedly put on the will had its origin and issue in "will-worship"; contempt of the body showed not the heavenly but the earthly mind. St. Paul saw how from speculation about transcendental mysteries and the inherent evil of matter, and rules of abstinence which made too much of physiological facts, it



was easy to pass to something like animalism. "Voluntary humility," the grovelling habit of mind opposed to true manliness, was the antithesis of Christian liberty and courage. The rule of the spiritual life was: "As therefore ye received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in Him, rooted and builded up in Him, and stablished in your faith."

The Epistle "to the Ephesians," written for the circle of Asian churches including Colossæ, emphasises again the glory of Christ in His resurrection and His elevation "above all rule, and authority, and power, and dominion." The wisdom of true Christian faith is referred to, possibly as against the false wisdom or *gnosis* of theosophy. But the main theme of the epistle is the deliverance Christians have obtained from the disorder, darkness, and death of the heathen world. Immorality, indeed, still lurks among them; but they are to walk "as children of light."

Turning to the Pastoral Epistles, we find clear allusions to a developed Gnosticism, still approaching Christianity through Judaism. Timothy has been left in Ephesus to oppose the "different doctrine," which taught men to "give heed to fables and endless genealogies, which minister questionings" (1 Tim. i. 4). The

teachers of this doctrine claim to be interpreters of the law, but "they understand neither what they say nor whereof they confidently affirm." It had come about as the Spirit foretold: men were falling away from the faith, "giving heed to seducing spirits and doctrines of devils . . . forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from meats, which God created to be received with thanksgiving" (ch. iv. 1, 3). Timothy is charged to guard that which is committed to him, and to turn away from the "profane babblings and oppositions of the gnosis which is falsely so called."

In the Second Epistle reference is made to "strife about words" and "profane babblings," the miserable dregs of theosophic controversy. Hymenæus and Philetus have been teaching that the resurrection is already past, assuming a false spirituality, or perhaps aiming at a doctrine of absorption into the Divine Essence. Nor does it appear that the worst is over. "The time will come when they will not endure the sound doctrine; but, having itching ears, will heap to themselves teachers after their own lusts; and will turn away their ears from the truth, and turn aside unto fables."

Titus laboured among the Cretans, and the epistle addressed to him speaks of "Jewish

fables and commandments of men who turn away from the truth," whose mind and conscience are defiled, "who profess that they know God; but by their works they deny Him, being abominable, and disobedient, and unto every good work reprobate" (ch. i. 14-16). The propaganda of the Judaizing sect apparently survives; but it has fallen into most disreputable hands, and become unblushingly antinomian. "Foolish questionings and genealogies, and strifes and fightings about the law," are the stock-in-trade of the factious, and Titus is charged to deal summarily with those who persist in troubling the churches.

The Second Epistle of Peter and the Epistle of Jude, which considerably resemble each other, show the desire of their writers to meet Gnosticism on its own ground. They enter into discussions regarding the fall of the evil angels and their punishment, the power and limitations of the angels that have kept their principality, Michael and the rest; they also discuss the creation and destruction of the world, and the future punishment of the wicked. The whole atmosphere of Christian life as revealed in these epistles is turbulent: the churches are infested by mockers, men who doubt the promise of Christ's coming, who wrest the Scriptures to their own destruc-

tion, who defile the flesh, and set at nought dominion, and rail at dignities, who are "hidden rocks" in the love-feasts, "clouds without water, carried along by winds, autumn trees without fruit, twice dead, plucked up by the roots; wandering stars, for whom the blackness of darkness hath been reserved for ever." The confusion reflected in these epistles may have been confined to a few churches with which the writers were acquainted; yet it is difficult to understand how even within a limited area Christianity could have been so soon perverted. Discipline must have been exceedingly lax, either because authority was insufficient, or because the office-bearers of the churches had themselves yielded to the evil influences of the time.

In his First Epistle St. John speaks of "many antichrists," deniers of the Christhood of Jesus and His Divine worship. These had gone forth from the Church, not under compulsion, but as a result of their gradual rejection of the essential doctrines of Christianity, and now they endeavoured to subvert the faith of those who still held the true creed. One form of Gnosticism was that which denied the reality of Christ's life in the flesh. The notion was that as an emanation from God, Christ had assumed the mere appearance of a human body, so that neither His

sufferings nor His death were actual. In the Second Epistle this heresy is condemned as specially antichristian. We may be almost certain that it was in Ephesus, or some other Asian city, St. John had found those who endeavoured to deprive the gospel of its essential power, by taking from it the mediation of Christ, and the atonement of the cross. More than any other theosophical error, this appeared to St. John dangerous and deadly. Not only in the Epistles, but in his Gospel, he set himself to controvert it. The Word of God manifest in the flesh, "that which we have heard, that which we have seen with our eyes, that which we beheld, and our hands handled, concerning the Word of Life"—these are the subjects of his testimony. The heresy he had in view may not have been widely professed, but it had far-reaching effects, in the way of causing indifference to fleshly sin, and separating faith from practical life. The name of Cerinthus, although not mentioned in any of the New Testament writings, is closely connected in history with this corruption of Christianity. "The lower earthly Messiah, the man Jesus, was, according to Cerinthus, only the vehicle and organ of that heavenly Christ who wrought in him. The heavenly Christ was raised above all suffering; He withdrew from the man Jesus

when he was given up to the pains of death.”<sup>1</sup> It is easy to trace in the Epistles of St. John the strain of earnest contention with these views. The “philosophy” of Cerinthus may have been ethically blameless, but it left no safe position either for morality or faith. On the whole, the Gnosticism of the apostolic period affected the churches less in the way of perverting thought, than of relaxing the bonds of piety and duty. The gospel was clear, definite, self-evidential, and held its own way more or less in conflict with the dreams and illusions of the time, declaring always the need of repentance and regeneration, calling men from idolatry and impure life to the redeeming evangel of the crucified and exalted Son of God.

The addresses to the Asian churches contained in Rev. ii., iii., belong to an earlier period than the Epistles of St. John. The Nicolaitans, to whom reference is repeatedly made, appear to have taught that freedom from the law came with the knowledge of spiritual mysteries; and this freedom was understood in a carnal and immoral sense. Their opinions are described as the depths of Satan, and the schismatics themselves as a synagogue of Satan. They are

<sup>1</sup> Neander, *General History of the Christian Religion and Church*, Bohu's Translation, vol. ii. p. 45.

compared to Balaam, whose scheme for the seduction of the Israelites was a type of the most hateful treachery to religion. The Book of Revelation flames against these and all other foes of the Church, and hurries on through temptestuous prophecy to victorious peace. In the time of sore trial it was the *reveille* of Christian courage, endurance, and hope.

## CHAPTER IX.

### THE MESSAGE AND WORK OF ST. JOHN.

THE Apocalypse, by whomsoever written, and at whatever time, bears a peculiar relation to the thought and life of the Church. Nothing else belonging to the apostolic age has the same poetical genius, the same tumultuous vigour. Eagerly Christian it is, yet in a different manner from the other New Testament books. Starting apparently from a reading of the last discourse of our Lord as reported in St. Matthew's Gospel (ch. xxiv.), it launches into eschatology, intolerant of unbelief, breathing indignation against the enemies of the Christian faith, splendidly hopeful as regards the coming glory of Christ and the blessedness of the redeemed. It knows one great enemy of Christ whose blasphemy has infected the whole world, so that purgation must be with blood and fire. Trumpets sound, vials are poured forth, destruction and death follow,



the smoke of the abyss darkens sun and air, men gnaw their tongues for pain, the earthquakes, and the cities of the nations fall. And yet, in a heaven above the veiled sun and smitten stars, the victors stand with harps of gold around a glassy sea, streams of living water flow, beside which the heavenly Shepherd leads His flock; and, louder than the crash of earthquake and universal war, is heard the voice of great multitudes in swelling hallelujahs.

The book is Judæo-Christian in a way of its own. Closely akin to Old Testament prophecies, it is Hebraistic in style and language. It recurs frequently to the worship of Israel and to the city and temple of Jerusalem, and gives to Christ names and dignities that emphasise His relation to Jewish history. Among New Testament books it alone enumerates the tribes; even the heavenly Jerusalem is described as having on its twelve gates "names written which are the names of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel." Those who are sealed on their foreheads as servants of God, are a hundred and forty and four thousand Israelites, the elect remnant of the nation apparently, and these are the nucleus of the "great multitude, which no man could number, out of every nation, and of all tribes and peoples and tongues." The four "living

creatures " and other visionary figures, which appear again and again, are taken with various alterations from the Books of Ezekiel, Zechariah, and Daniel. Those who "come victorious from the beast" (ch. xv.) sing the song of Moses the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, the words of which are derived from the Old Testament. The woman of ch. xii., "arrayed with the sun," who gives birth to the royal man-child, is the Jewish Church; and the Apocalypse knows no great New Testament Church, for the Christian communities are spoken of as isolated, not as cohering in a single "body of Christ." The victorious Lamb (ch. xiv. 1) stands upon Mount Zion; and the desolation of the "Holy City" is to be repaired by the descent from heaven of another city, the New Jerusalem, which is the Bride, the Lamb's wife. The "great city," again, in the streets of which the dead bodies of the witnesses lie, "where also their Lord was crucified," spiritually Sodom and Egypt, is Pilate's city, the blaspheming city, Rome. The Roman power is charged with the murder of Christ.

The appearance of the Lord, as described in ch. i. and elsewhere, is based not on recollection of His human personality, but on the vision of Daniel (ch. x. 5, 6); and His dignity and power are those of the conquering Messiah of Hebrew prophecy. He

is the "Lion that is of the tribe of Judah," the "root and the offspring of David," and He bears the "key of David." He is also the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world, and the "Word of God," for the book is saturated with belief in His sacrifice and Divine dignity. Yet His special attendants are the hundred and forty-four thousand, who have kept an ascetic purity, and have been purchased from among men to be the first-fruits unto God and unto the Lamb (ch. xiv. 4, 5). In token of His suffering and power, He is arrayed in a garment sprinkled with blood; for He is an avenger, the despotic ruler of the Gentiles. "Out of His mouth proceedeth a sharp sword, that with it He should smite the nations, and He shall rule them with a rod of iron; and He treadeth the winepress of the wrath of Almighty God." The consummation of His triumph in the glory of that city which is called His bride is marked by the fulfilment of an Isaian prophecy: "The nations shall walk amidst the light thereof, and the kings of the earth do bring their glory into it. And the gates thereof shall in no wise be shut by day (for there shall be no night there): and they shall bring the glory and the honour of the nations into it."

But not on the great hopes of Hebrew prophecy alone does the author of the Apocalypse

found. His conceptions of the person of Christ and the breadth of His redemptive work are original and striking. The figure of the Lamb "as though it had been slain" gives pathos to the soteriology of the book, and is in pervading contrast to the enmity of the world from which Christ's followers suffer. The dignity of the manhood of Jesus is implied when He is called "the Amen, the Faithful and True Witness, the beginning of the creation of God." His place is "in the midst of the throne, and of the four living creatures, and the elders," and He receives their praises. Higher and more significant is the title, "Son of God" (ch. ii. 18); and He is also "the First and the Last, and the Living One." Here is the participation in the Divine nature, which has given His sacrifice its power, and made His blood availing for the ransom and purification of men.

Early in the book there is a vision pointing to a great redemption. "After these things I saw, and behold, a great multitude, which no man could number, out of every nation, and of all tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the Lamb, arrayed in white robes, and palms in their hands." These are heard crying, "Salvation to our God, which sitteth on the throne, and unto the Lamb"; and the song is one of

thanksgiving for their own deliverance. They are the army of martyrs who have come out of great tribulation. The purity of their raiment is accounted for by the unique metaphor that they have "washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb," and they enjoy the tearless blessedness of the heavenly paradise. One vision is marked by the declaration: "The kingdom of the world is become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ." The meaning seems to be that the dominion hitherto exercised by the Roman Emperor is to pass into the hands of God. When the Divine government is established by the discomfiture and destruction of "Babylon," the voice of a great multitude, "as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of mighty thunders," is heard saying, "Hallelujah, for the Lord our God, the Almighty, reigneth." On this follows the "marriage supper of the Lamb," whose "bride hath made herself ready" (ch. xix.).

Most striking, however, through its contrast with the tenor of many of the visions, is the voice out of the throne which proclaims, "Behold the tabernacle of God is with men, and He shall dwell with them, and they shall be His peoples." In the new world, pain, sorrow, and death shall be no more; whosoever thirsts shall receive of

the water of life; those who overcome shall inherit all things. The "holy city, Jerusalem," which has on its gates the names of the tribes of Israel, bears on its twelve foundations the names of the apostles of the Lamb. Within the walls, "in the midst of the street thereof," is the "river of the water of life," on either side of which grows the tree of life, bearing twelve kinds of fruits, yielding fruit every month; "and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations." Into this city those alone enter who are "written in the Lamb's book of life." Yet the invitation is heard: "He that is athirst, let him come: he that will, let him take the water of life freely." The river of life of Ezekiel's New Jerusalem has, like this of the Apocalypse, a tree yielding twelve kinds of fruit. But the water and the tree and the city in Ezekiel are for the Hebrew tribes especially. It is again in Isaiah (ch. lv.) we find the Old Testament analogue of the universal invitation to the water of life; and in the earlier collection of oracles (ch. xxv.) Jerusalem appears as the great festival city of all nations, the centre of light and joy to the whole world.

On the whole, the Judaistic strain of the book is mingled with another as strong. From the first the author glories in Christ, the crucified

and risen Saviour. There is no hint of law-keeping. Jews who deny Christ and oppose His truth are a "synagogue of Satan"; and none have a right to the promises of God but those who have their names written in the Lamb's book of life. The Apocalypse brings comfort to the faithful, and showers promises upon them; but the fearful and unbelieving, with idolaters and murderers, have their place in the shadows and fires of Divine wrath. It would seem to be assumed throughout that men have already heard the gospel and made their choice, and placed themselves either on the right or left hand of the Judge.

It has been observed that passages which compare in their prophetic tone with the Apocalypse are to be found in the early writings of St. Paul, who began with the roll of Hebrew poetry in his ears, and in its spirit of fervid anticipation and haste: "The Lord Himself shall descend from heaven, with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: then we that are alive, that are left, shall together with them be caught up in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord." "To you that are afflicted, rest with us, at the revelation of the

Lord Jesus from heaven with the angels of His power in flaming fire, rendering vengeance to them that know not God, and to them that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus: who shall suffer punishment, even eternal destruction from the face of the Lord and from the glory of His might, when He shall come to be glorified in His saints, and to be marvelled at in all them that believed in that day." And again: "Then shall be revealed the lawless one, whom the Lord Jesus shall slay with the breath of His mouth, and bring to nought by the manifestation of His coming; even he, whose coming is according to the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders, and with all deceit of unrighteousness for them that are perishing." These extracts from 1 and 2 Thessalonians bear a striking resemblance to the Apocalypse. The eager Hebrew spirit appears in both writers; and we may even say that portions of the Apocalypse seem to fill out with their startling images the outlines sketched by St. Paul. In 2 Peter and the Epistle of Jude the same cry is heard. There can be no doubt that the Apocalypse confirmed judgments and hopes which had become current in the early Church. Yet it stands alone in its sustained vehemence. There sounds through



it one trumpet-voice alternately of doom and of victory.

For our present purpose there is no need to decide between two dates for the Apocalypse which find most favour, the earlier in Galba's reign, A.D. 68, and the later in Domitian's, about A.D. 85. And indeed there seems no reason for supposing that the composition was continuous. The book is a collection of visions, which the writer may have had at intervals during a lengthy period. The expressions, "After these things I saw," "After these things I heard," and others of a similar kind, frequently occurring, mark the opening of more or less distinct episodes of the revelation, separated from one another perhaps by months, or even years. And it would be against the analogy of the prophetic books of the Old Testament to suppose that the visions advance in what may be called historical sequence, never returning on events already reflected in the mirror. It is practically hopeless to arrange the contents of the Apocalypse so that a history or forecast of the history of the Church may be made out. The visions are not independent; the same quality of imagination pervades them, the same longing and indignation; and there is a steady process of thought. Yet it is possible that scenes more or less resembling one another

corresponded to different trains of events. On the other hand, visions not apparently connected may have had a common source. No contemporaneous records give sure data for the interpretation; and the conjectures some have thrown out must be very cautiously received. The book, as a whole, can hardly be called a work of artistic plan. If it were, the messages to the seven churches would not have had a place in it. A scheme of interpretation, therefore, is very difficult, if not impossible.

Passing to the next subject, the relation to St. John's own life of the various writings ascribed to him, the first question to be considered regards the possibility or likelihood that the Apocalypse, the Epistles, and the Gospel were fruits of the same inspiration, the same genius. Criticism has dealt copiously with this problem; and characteristic expressions found in the Apocalypse and the other books have been collated in sufficient numbers to remove, at least, the first flush of prejudice against a single authorship. To these it is not proposed to refer in detail. One example, however, may be fully wrought out, to show the nature of the argument.

The idea of witness-bearing is a mark of the writings; and the same words, translated *witness*,

*bear witness, testimony, testify*, occur frequently in all. Corresponding to the title Apocalypse or Revelation, it is said of the writer, that he "bore witness (ἐμαρτύρησε) to the word of God and the witnessing (μαρτυρίαν) of Jesus Christ" (ch. i. 2). Jesus Christ is "the Witness (μάρτυς), the Faithful One" (ch. i. 5, iii. 14). It is "by reason of the witnessing of Jesus Christ" the writer is in the isle called Patmos. In ch. vi. there are seen under the altar the souls of them that were slain for the witnessing (μαρτυρίαν) which they gave. In ch. xv. "the sanctuary of the tabernacle of the witness" (μαρτυρίου) is opened in heaven. The "testimony of Jesus" is the charge of the holy brethren; it is also the spirit of prophecy (ch. xix.), and for it the faithful have been beheaded (ch. xx.). The closing chapter repeats the idea of witnessing in various ways: "I, Jesus, have sent Mine angel to testify unto you these things in the churches"; "I testify unto every man that heareth"; "He which testifieth these things saith, Surely I come quickly." The writer feels the need of emphatic and solemn declaration of what is believed, seen, and heard. Christ is God's Witness; those who have faith in Christ are His witnesses before the world, unto death. The impression we gather is that of obstinate

incredulity and enmity, against which the truth must be strenuously advanced. Christ and angels and men affirm Divine verities; and judgment falls on those who reject the witnessing.

Turning to 1 John, we find soon and often the same idea. In ch. i. 2, "The life was manifested, and we have seen and bear witness (*μαρτυροῦμεν*)"; in ch. iv. 14, "And we have beheld and bear witness." These expressions are entirely in the spirit of the apocalyptic witnessing. Ch. v., however, introduces a somewhat different aspect of the idea. "It is the Spirit that witnesseth. . . . There are three that bear witness: the Spirit, the water, and the blood"; and at v. 9, "If we receive the witnessing (*μαρτυρίαν*) of men, the witnessing of God is greater; for this is the witnessing of God, that He hath borne witness (*μεμαρτύρηκε*) concerning His Son. He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself." Here the witnessing is much more subjective. The Spirit, the water, and the blood, witness to the believing soul. The Divine witnessing is in contrast to that of men, which is verbal; and it is effectual in a higher sense, becoming a consciousness of truth in the believing mind. The supreme witnessing of the Christian faith is of this nature. It makes clear to the spiritual consciousness

“that God hath given to us eternal life, and that this life is in His Son.”

So far there is similarity, and, along with that, progress of thought. The external is still of value. Yet even the things which have been heard and seen and handled are transmuted in the spiritual heat of the new life. It is not the words and deeds, but their inner meaning, an apocalypse to the soul, that engages the writer of the epistle. In the third letter, which in point of order should perhaps be first, the word *μαρτυρέω*, “bear witness,” occurs twice with a less subjective meaning.

The Gospel, after the paragraphs of introduction, presents the familiar words: “There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. The same came for witnessing, that he might bear witness concerning the Light.” In three other places in the same chapter, the witnessing of John is referred to. In the interview with Nicodemus, Christ says (ch. iii. 11): “Verily, verily, I say unto thee, We speak that we do know, and of what we have seen we bear witness; and ye accept not our witnessing.” Regarding Christ’s witnessing it is affirmed, a little further on (ch. iii. 32): “What He hath seen and heard, of that He beareth witness; and His witnessing no man accepteth. He who

accepteth His witnessing hath set his seal to this, that God is true." The witnessing is not purely subjective—it is that of word and life; but the apprehension of it is entirely spiritual. The Samaritan woman at Jacob's well hears Christ, and in the village makes her impression of Him known. Many of the people believe, for the saying of the woman, "bearing witness" (ch. iv. 39). The witness to Christ of the Father, and of the works which the Father gave Him to do, is the subject of a paragraph in ch. v., in the course of which the verb and substantive together occur nine times. The verse immediately following (ver. 39) enjoins searching of the Scriptures, "which bear witness concerning Me." Passing to ch. vii., we find Christ explaining the world's hatred of Him, on the ground that He bears witness concerning it, that the works thereof are evil. Another group of the same words is to be found in ch. viii., where Christ's witness to Himself is placed beside that of the Father. The witnessing of the Spirit of truth is in ch. xv. joined with that of the disciples: "He shall bear witness concerning Me. And ye also bear witness." In the account of our Lord's trial before the high priest the word naturally occurs; and before Pilate Christ declares, "I am come into the world, that I should bear witness unto

the truth." The closing sentences of the Gospel also use the word as descriptive of the whole purpose of the evangelist.

The facts regarding this cluster of words are not only significant in themselves, but doubly so when the comparatively infrequent use of the terms throughout the other New Testament books is taken into account. The circumstances of the Christians who had to suffer for bearing witness to the Name no doubt led to the use of *μαρτυρία*, etc., in the Apocalypse; and the altered impact of the idea in the First Epistle is due to the more subjective and spiritual nature of the thought. In the Gospel, again, history is dealt with, and verbal testimony becomes important. Yet the testimony of the Spirit to the human consciousness is a striking feature of the *μαρτυρία* there described. The argument from the whole group of words and ideas is strongly in favour of a single authorship.

One other resemblance among many may be noticed—the use of the expression "My Father" by Christ in the Apocalypse and the Gospel. In the messages to the churches, "My Father" occurs thrice; and the coincidence with the Fourth Gospel is so manifestly undesigned, that one is tempted to say no further proof of the single authorship need be sought for. The Gospel is

written by some one familiar with that expression so frequently employed by Christ, some one who had been especially touched by it. He reproduces it along with the other "My God," as if he had in his memory the message confided to Mary Magdalene on the resurrection day: "Say to My brethren, I ascend unto My Father and your Father, and to My God and your God."

Suppose, however, it is admitted that these and other similarities of diction go to prove the identity of the author of the Apocalypse with the epistoler and the evangelist, there remains the far more serious question of general scope and tone. And the theory that the visions of the Apocalypse extended over a considerable time, perhaps to well on in the reign of Domitian, may seem to throw fresh difficulty in the way of a solution. For, this being assumed, only a few years could have elapsed between the composition of the Apocalypse and of the Epistles. We can easily accept the suggestion that solecisms of John's Greek composition, such as are to be seen in the former, were corrected by an amanuensis or disciple who revised the latter. We can see also that when the prophetic strain was dropped, the Hebraisms and the impetuosity of the diction would in great measure disappear. But why is the theme of sudden and dreadful



judgments about to overtake the world almost put aside? Why does he who had dipped his pencil "in the hues of earthquake and eclipse," turn to speak of love? Why is the outward lot of Christians no longer spoken of, and the inward life dwelt upon in its genesis and growth? Can it be maintained that within a short time the vehement author of the Apocalypse began to find his mission in declaring that God is love, that he who dwelleth in love dwelleth in God? Judgment is certainly not forgotten in the Epistles and the Gospel; the note of stringent criticism and condemnation of the evil world is still heard; yet there is not now exultation over the fearful doom of the empire. Persecution has not come to an end. It will increase. There are many antichrists, and the world-power is as strong as ever. But the energy and fire of apocalyptic indignation have passed into calm reason and loving solicitude; passionate declarations have been exchanged for quiet persuasiveness. We are compelled to consider how the spiritual life of St. John and his Christian genius came to yield this new and unexpected fruit.

There seems good reason for surmising that up to A.D. 60 at least, John lived quietly at

Jerusalem, a companion of James, the Lord's brother, with those personal convictions regarding Christ and that zealous love to Him which had come through the tenderest fellowship. We know that in the early years after the ascension John was a constant worshipper in the temple, and he probably continued the practice. Yet the growing antagonism of the Jews to "The Way" must have gradually alienated the apostle from them. He remembered the cross, and the sacred trust given him by the dying Lord. To John, those who persistently reviled his Divine Friend and made the cross a mockery were liars and blasphemers. But, turning from the anti-christian Jews, he might not at first become sympathetic towards the Gentiles. For his patriotism continued keen, his hopes were for a regenerate Israel; and the Gentiles were to his mind identified with the Roman power, a vast federation opposed to his country and his faith. The earlier writings of St. Paul had certainly influenced John, as we have already seen; and they opened glimpses of the redemption of the heathen world. With the later Pauline Epistles, also known to John, came a still wider vision of hope. Concerning the future redemption and the glory of Christ, a passage in Ephesians (ch. i. 17 *ff.*) is strikingly parallel to the Book of

Revelation: "That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you a spirit of wisdom and revelation (apocalypse) in the knowledge of Him; having the eyes of your heart enlightened, that ye may know what is the hope of His calling, what the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what the exceeding greatness of His power to usward who believe, according to that working of the strength of His might which He wrought in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead, and made Him to sit at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule, and authority, and power, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come." More perhaps in general scope than in verbal parallelism, this may appear related to the Apocalypse. But the correspondence is evident, and we must believe that even when he was in Jerusalem John enjoyed no small breadth of outlook and hope regarding the heathen world.

Still the interest which St. John had in the Gentiles was put to the test when, leaving Palestine, perhaps about A.D. 68, he entered upon his new experiences among the churches of Asia. In the cities he saw the vigorous life of the age flowing to and from the temples, to

and from the great centres of thought and power. As compared with the vast population of those cities, the members of the Christian churches seemed at first sight very few. The Hebrews who believed, together with the Gentile converts who had found through them union with the true God and His Christ, appeared but a forlorn hope in the assault on ancient superstition and the thrones of evil. The blaspheming heathen power had not changed; Christians had suffered, were still suffering, many of them with indomitable courage; the roll of martyrs was long and honourable. As the apostle went from city to city, he found also that the Christian churches were centres around which faith rallied, and that the secret leaven of the gospel was widely spread. This seems, however, to have meant to him that the inevitable hour of combat was near; and, without some direct Divine intervention, the fierce power of blaspheming Rome would overwhelm Christianity. The only hope of believers, accordingly, was in the promise of the Lord's second coming, to the rapid approach of which all signs appeared to point. With this on the horizon, John looked around on human life and marked its spirit, and thoughts of the judgment about to fall crowded on his mind. It was decreed; it was terrible; but it

was just. His theme was prescribed to him, to announce and vindicate the consuming righteousness of God. When he was forced to retire to Patmos, perhaps because he had openly attacked the idolatry of the Asian cities, faith and zeal found embodiment in the apocalyptic visions. The little island afforded no audience. But he could fill scrolls with Christian prophecy, and his words, like the roll of swelling waters, might beat against imperial gates, and shake the strongholds of unholy power.

The Apocalypse expressed again and again the conviction that Christ's second advent and the end of the existing order of things were impending. "The things which must shortly come to pass" (ch. i. 1); "the time is at hand" (ch. i. 3); "I come quickly" (ch. iii. 11); "The Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, sent His angel to show unto His servants the things which must shortly come to pass. And, behold, I come quickly" (ch. xii. 6, 7); "He which testifieth these things saith, Yea: I come quickly" (ch. xxii. 20). Before the very eyes of the seer events seemed to be moving towards a rapid inevitable issue. So far as his revelations were known and believed, they must have revived the notion universally held in the first decade after our

Lord's death, now perhaps waning in the Gentile churches, that the world was near its end. Conveying the promise of a great Divine intervention, the Apocalypse sustained the Christians in their endurance of hardship and cruelty.

Here, then, is the situation disclosed by the book. John, whose nature is emotional, who is easily impressed by outward influences, open also to the light from the throne of heavenly righteousness, has been hurried along by his eager faith; and we see him, his eyes aflame with indignation and prophetic fire, looking for the last things. He is a "Son of Thunder" as at the first, unsympathetic towards all who are not bravely Christian. The rising day of the world's new life is darkened with clouds of judgment, and he exults to think that Christ shall soon inherit His destined kingdom. Beyond and above the sin and the doom there is light. Jerusalem destroyed, great Babylon cast like a millstone into the sea, there shall be a new city of God upon an exceeding high mountain, a true Olympus. The splendour of it is dazzling. What is the glory of Rome to that of the city in which the throne of God and of the Lamb occupies the central place, to which all the highways of the world converge? And after war shall be peace, after tribulation, joy. Is it far

away, beyond a thousand years of Satanic discord ? or is the generation living to see the splendour ? On that the oracle gives no clear voice. But the judgments are at hand, and the victory and splendour will come ; and the city shall gather its multitudes out of every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people. *e*

Passing now from this stage of St. John's inspiration to that which is reached in the Epistles, let us first notice the limit within which a change takes place.

For one thing, it seems clear that the virulence of persecution had gone by, so that the Christian life had more room for its proper development. There are indications of this in ch. ii. 8 of the First Epistle : "The darkness is passing away, and the true light already shineth." Love is asserting itself against hatred ; the kindlier emotions, which are the true effluence of the Christian spirit, shine within the churches and about them. In the time of severe trial, believers had been called to "resist unto blood, striving against sin" ; and in ch. ii. 13, those who had come successfully through this ordeal are addressed : "I wrote unto you, young men, because ye have overcome τὸν πονηρόν," the Evil One—that is, the imperial enemy, not as in ch. iii. 8, *diabolos*. These have found that One is in them

greater than he that is in the world, or *cosmos*. (Ch. iv. 4.) It is clear to John now, that, like all human institutions, the mighty empire is under the law of change. "The *cosmos* passeth away and the lust thereof" (ch. ii. 17). It appears also, from certain signs, that the end may be close at hand. "There have risen many antichrists; whereby we know that it is the last hour." It still remains true that the world under imperial law knows not Christians, is not aware of the object of their association and work, nor what is the nature of their power. They are "children of God"; and the *cosmos*, ignorant of their heavenly outlook, maintains its opposition, perhaps by enforcing the laws against the *sodalitates*, or clubs, so as to prevent meetings for Christian worship. But there is no hint that the approaching change from the old order to the new is to be accompanied by physical manifestations of the Divine wrath.

Again, as to the second coming of Christ, a new conception of the whole subject is marked by the expression, "Greater is He that is in you than he that is in the world" (ch. iv. 4). It may be said that, in the Apocalypse, God and Jesus Christ, as the Head of the Divine kingdom on earth, appear *for* believers. Now the indwelling of God, the energy of Christ as a power



in the soul, give the spirit-born their strength. And to this corresponds an expression which has a singular hypothetical turn. In ch. ii. 28, and again in ch. iii. 2, it is not affirmed that Christ will appear again in the flesh; only the possibility is expressed, "if He shall be manifested." In the former passage, indeed, the *if* is not absolute; and in the second passage, the alternative translation, "if it shall be manifested," has some colour. But there is perhaps a question whether the manifestation of Christ is to be looked for either immediately or in the way of visible presence. He is to be in believers the life of their souls, and the manifestation will result in the fulness of their resemblance to Him as children of God. In one passage (ch. iv. 17), the "day of judgment" is mentioned, and here the final assize may be intended. Yet there is good reason for interpreting the words, "in the day of judgment," as relating to the trial of Christians for their religion before provincial authorities. And we have a general principle tending to confirm this view in ch. v. 4, where there is no hint of a counter-judgment, a visitation of Divine wrath which shall destroy the enemies of Christianity, but, with true prophetic insight, the writer says: "This is the victory that hath overcome the world, even our

faith." Finally, it is to be observed that the manifestation of the Son of God is affirmed to be not against men or nations, but against their spiritual enemy. "To this end was the Son of God manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil."

Now it cannot be said, comparing the epistle with the Apocalypse, that the point of view is entirely fresh. Regarding Babylon, that is the Roman Empire, a voice in the Apocalypse says: "Come forth, my people, out of her, that ye have no fellowship with her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues: for her sins have reached even unto heaven, and God hath remembered her iniquities." The same separateness between those who believe in Christ and those who are of the world is maintained in the epistle. The *cosmos* is associated with "the evil one"; it is not to be loved, but overcome; it hates the followers of Christ, and its hatred is not to be wondered at. There is also heat of indignation in the epistle against those who do not believe the testimony of God to His Son. But for the very *cosmos* with which Christians have to contend, Christ is the propitiation (ch. ii. 2), and judgment is quite as strongly given against those who profess to know Christ, and yet do not keep His commandments, as against those

who deny His Godhead and His life in the flesh. It seems that a time of comparative quiet has come, when Christians, no longer sifted by persecution, are under strong temptation to seek the world's glory, and because they covet social position, to fall into hatred of one another and neglect of the destitute. The members of the churches do not all appear now as suffering saints, "who have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb," who are by their purity distinguished from the murderers, adulterers, and liars of the world. There may be murderers and liars in the circle of professed believers. Many false prophets are heard, who claim to speak in the name of God, and against them Christians have to be warned. They are to try the spirits; they are furnished with tests which they are to apply to those who claim their attention. It has, in fact, become evident to the writer of the epistle that the existing order is not to be violently overturned, that Christians are to be instruments in the hand of God for the gradual establishment of a new order. They can become fit for this task only through their love to each other, the purity and power of their faith, their unity with Christ; and here lies the chief concern of the author. The law of love is that on which stress is laid.

Through that God is known, and by obedience to it His life becomes energetic in Christian circles, and beyond them. There is no expectation of the speedy conversion of the heathen world to Christianity. At the close of the epistle the distinction is sharply maintained between those who are of God, and the *cosmos* which "lieth in the evil one." The duty of Christians is not to convert but to overcome. Still it is by faith, and in the spirit of truth and love, they are to seek their victory. And the way is opened for efforts on behalf of the world, inasmuch as propitiation is made for its sins.

Our survey of some of the points touched in the epistle, and the conditions under which it was written, strengthens the argument for a single authorship, or at least removes difficulties that seemed formidable. It is quite according to analogy that a man of strongly emotional nature, loving Christ and Christ's work, should begin with the hope of His speedy and glorious triumph over enemies; but afterwards, when necessity was felt, should change to earnest solicitude about His friends. John finished his Apocalypse in tremulous expectation of awful events, which the voices he heard seemed to place in the immediate future. But the mundane order, which was to all appearance incompatible with

the progress of the kingdom of God, did not fall to pieces, did not suffer abrupt and terrible destruction. The Roman Empire, the *cosmos*, still held together; the work of the world went on; Christians, unable to separate themselves from the common duties of life, kept at their posts, and found the value of their faith in the discipline they shared with other men. The great revolutions and calamities of the apocalyptic visions were to be deferred; and, pending their fulfilment, the mind of the apostle turned to the condition of the churches and the spiritual life of believers. Soon after Domitian's accession, while there was a lull in the storm, St. John seems to have returned to Asia, and begun the new mission which the state of the churches required. With chastened mind, with a sense of present duty, which by no means overcame his hope, yet checked his exultation, he turned to the task of building up his fellow-believers in their most holy faith. It was love of Christ that had brought him to the summit of vision, and that same feeling now made him the eager teacher of Christ-like love, as the mark of those who were born anew. His indignation against the world fades as he discovers the abuses and evils that prevail within the Christian circle. His heart is sore, not

because those of the faith are persecuted, but because many of them sin, and make light of their sin, hate their brethren, believe themselves to be in the way of salvation while they do unrighteousness. Visions of the glory to come have to be exchanged for quiet and patient teaching of the truth as it is in Christ.

And this could not but lead the apostle to a new study of that Divine life which it had been his privilege to know in its manifestation to men. What did Christianity exist for? What was it to do for the world? These inquiries, which the circumstances of the time demanded, could be solved only by a right understanding of the words of Christ, and the testimony regarding God embodied in Christ's deeds and death. The sin of men and the cleansing blood of Christ, the darkness of the world and the light which shone in Christ, the hatred that is in the human heart and the love that is of God, the faith in Jesus as the Christ which is the condition of the new birth,—these were doctrines which could be established only in the words and life of the Lord Himself. The disciple began to retrace, with fine care and spiritual intelligence, the way he had taken nearly sixty years before, when he went from city to city with his Master. Grace and truth gleamed through many an avenue

of memory ; Christ's works of beneficence, His words of heavenly power and peace, the tears He wept, the sunshine of His smile, gradually came into clear relief,—the revelation of God, the living evangel of the world.

In the Gospel, the fruit of St. John's inspiration at its final and highest stage, there are notes similar to those of the Apocalypse and epistles. It reports the words of Christ, which make profound severance between the life redeemed and the life condemned : " This is the judgment, that the light is come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the light ; for their works were evil. For every one that doeth ill hateth the light, and cometh not to the light " ; again : " The hour cometh in which all that are in the tombs shall hear His voice, and shall come forth ; they that have done good unto the resurrection of life, and they that have done ill unto the resurrection of judgment." These passages, as the Rev. Stanley Leathes has pointed out, resemble Rev. xxii. 12 : " Behold, I come quickly, and My reward is with Me, to render to each man according as his work is." Notable, however, is the difference, the contrast, between the two writings, especially on the subject of the last things. The discourses reported by St. Matthew and St. Luke bearing

on what appears to be the second advent of our Lord, have no place in the Fourth Gospel. Instead, there is the promise of the Paraclete (John xv., xvi.), who shall bear witness of Christ, who shall also "convict the world in respect of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment" (ch. xvi. 8). The glory of Christ in those who believe is to be through the Spirit: "He shall glorify Me, for He shall take of Mine, and shall declare it unto you."



## CHAPTER X.

### THE GOSPELS IN THE CHURCH.

IT is a singular fact, of which various explanations have been proposed, that throughout the epistles of the New Testament few references are made to the details of our Lord's life, or even to His discourses as reported in the Gospels. In no case does an apostle supplement his arguments or enforce his exhortations by quoting a parable spoken by Christ, saying, for instance, "as our Lord taught in the parable of the Sower," or, "as we learn from the parable of the Good Samaritan." We would naturally expect to find incidents of the life of Christ frequently used in the epistles by way of illustration. Still more would we expect our Lord's own sayings to be often cited in order to confirm doctrinal teaching and ethical direction. The main facts narrated in the Gospels underlie the apostolic writings; and the death and resurrection of Christ, in par-

ticular, are often recalled. But the passage in 2 Peter i. 17, 18, is almost unique: "For He received from God the Father honour and glory, when there came such a voice to Him from the excellent glory, This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased: and this voice we ourselves heard come out of heaven when we were with Him in the holy mount." Beside this may be placed the passage in 1 Cor. xv., where St. Paul, after stating barely "that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures; and that He was buried; and that He hath been raised on the third day according to the Scriptures," proceeds to give a list of the appearances of the risen Lord to Cephas, to the Twelve, to above five hundred brethren at once, and to James,—partly following, partly supplementing the Gospel narratives. But the absence of detail is noticeable, and indeed the only passage in the whole of the epistles of St. Paul which can be said to correspond verbally with a Gospel report, is the account of the institution of the Lord's Supper.

Looking into this subject, we find at once the whole question of the origin and early use of the Gospels confronting us. We have to inquire whether they existed in the first century as we have them now; if they did exist then, in what order they were written, and how they came to

be what they are ; further, we have to ask what relation the histories of our Lord's life had to the development of Christian faith. Of these points the last is the one we shall chiefly keep in view. Was it from Gospels such as we have the first churches learned their faith ? Or were the growth of the Christian religion and the faith of believers mainly guided by the epistles of St. Paul, St. Peter, and St. James, and by teaching which in its general strain resembled the epistles ?

Nothing is more common now than the affirmation that, for the essential elements of Christianity, we must return to the earthly human life of our Lord as the basis of everything,—Christian ethic, apologetic, doctrine, and life. Did Paul mean this when he wrote : “ Other foundation can no man lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ ” ? Did he mean that what constitutes the substance of our Gospels was then the study of Christians ? Not only as a matter of what may be called antiquarian interest, but far more as a question bearing on the nature of apostolic teaching and the development of Christianity, this whole subject demands investigation.

Weiss has said : “ The Christian faith would have remained just as it is, and lost no part of

what is its deepest foundation, had it pleased God to leave us only the apostolic teaching, as it lies before us in the epistles of the New Testament, and along with the Gospels, to deprive us of all information from which we might have wrought out for ourselves a detailed picture of Jesus' earthly life."<sup>1</sup> This is a bold position, very different from that which many take. Matthew Arnold, in one of his latest essays, wrote: "Jesus Himself, as I have remarked elsewhere, is even the better fitted to stand as the central figure of a religion, because His reporters so evidently fail to comprehend Him fully, and to report Him adequately. Being so evidently great, and yet so uncomprehended, and being now inevitably so to remain for ever, He thus comes to stand before us as what the philosophers call an *Absolute*."<sup>2</sup> The meaning of this seems to be that by so much as the personal life of Christ retires from view and becomes unknown and unknowable, leaving Him at length only as the Master of a method and a secret, to that extent and in that way He becomes most fitted to stand as the Head of a religion. Neither the evangelists nor the apostles understood Christ says Arnold. They give us only now and then

<sup>1</sup> *The Life of Christ*, vol. i. p. 15.

<sup>2</sup> *St. Paul and Protestantism, etc.*, Popular Edition, p. 163.

glimpses of the real Christ. Let us know the method and the secret, and attach them to a vague personality capable of inspiring emotion, and we have the true Christianity. It is a view that makes havoc of the Gospel narratives, but leaves the writings of Paul, in so far as he had the method and the secret, with a certain value and authority. Then we come down to the mental confusion of a writer who at one time says, "We are not bound by the words of Jesus spoken in Galilean ears, so much as by His spirit and temper, and the messages our own hearts receive. . . . Take the mere words of Christ, and make them the exact standard of morals, and use them in their narrow, legal, inelastic limitations, and you destroy Christianity"; who at another time says, "The practical impotence of pious ideals in regulating public conduct arises mainly from this very cause, that we perpetually act as though Christ never said what He meant, and rarely meant what He said; that He was a visionary, a glorious dreamer, a religious rhapsodist. . . . It is because we have lost sight of the true humanity of Jesus that His life has faded into so unreal a thing to us." And if we care to see the extreme beyond this confusion, the writings of the Russian Tolstoi will show it. He says: "The arbitrary separation of the metaphysical and ethical aspects of Chris-

tianity entirely disfigures the doctrine, and deprives it of every sort of meaning. The separation began with the preaching of Paul, who knew but imperfectly the ethical doctrine set forth in the Gospel of Matthew, and who preached a metaphysico-cabalistic theory, entirely foreign to the doctrine of Jesus. . . . And the metaphysical theory, with its accompanying ceremonial, deviated more and more from its true and primitive meaning, until it has reached its present stage of development, as a doctrine which explains the mysteries of a celestial life beyond the comprehension of human reason, and with all its complicated formulas gives no religious guidance whatever with regard to the regulation of this earthly life.”<sup>1</sup> There is plainly a difference of no common kind between the views of Christianity held by one who says that from the epistles alone we may find the true way, and one who says that these epistles, based on imperfect knowledge, have led the world astray, that we must go back to the words of Christ. Now, what do we mean by returning to the origin? What was the Christianity of the first century? Was it based mainly on apostolic doctrine, of which Tolstoi has said such hard things, or was it based on the ethical teaching of

<sup>1</sup> Tolstoi, *My Religion*, p. 219.

Christ and His example, as they are set forth in the Gospels? And how are we to understand Christianity to-day?

The earliest discourses reported in the Acts of the Apostles do not dwell on the character, deeds, sayings, and personal life of Christ. He is spoken of as "a man approved of God by mighty wonders and signs which God did by Him." He is called the "Holy and Righteous One," the "Prince of Life." He is the Prophet who was to be raised up like unto Moses. He is the holy Servant of God, anointed by Him. Stephen's long address rests no argument on the Divine wisdom of Christ; and there is no attempt to prove that the characteristics and power shown by Christ during His earthly human life gave Him pre-eminence. The only reference to Christ is in these words: "They killed them which showed before of the coming of the Righteous One; of whom ye have now become betrayers and murderers." Philip, indeed, is reported to have "preached Jesus" to the Ethiopian eunuch, beginning from the passage of Isaiah. And in this "preaching of Jesus," we must believe, there was included some account of His life on earth, of which the Ethiopian could not have been informed. We note also that when Peter went to Cæsarea to instruct Cornelius the centurion, the

discourse he gave, even as it appears in a brief report, was mainly on the subject of our Lord's ministry. The outline supplied by Luke includes references to the baptism of John, the beginning in Galilee, the enduement of Christ with the Holy Spirit and with power, the miracles of healing, the ministry in Judæa and Jerusalem, the crucifixion, the resurrection on the third day, and the appearance of the risen Lord to chosen witnesses, "who did eat and drink with Him after He rose from the dead." The filling up of this outline must have given a sufficient view of the life of Christ. But it was for a heathen who had heard little of Christ.

The conclusion to which we were led is that, where addressing themselves to Israelites, the apostles and early evangelists counted on a general knowledge of the life of Christ. It was known that He had spoken as never man spake; it was known that His teaching had been with authority, that the Roman centurion who had charge at His crucifixion said of Him, "Certainly this was a righteous Man," or, according to the Gospel of Mark, "Truly this Man was a Son of God." There were many in Judæa and Galilee who had been healed by Him of diseases, had eaten of the bread of the miracles, and joined in the hosannahs of His praise. His wisdom, His



purity, His patience and heavenliness, had struck the popular mind. Relying on the impression His life had produced, and the thrill of horror which had followed His death, the apostles began their preaching. The speedy revelation of the majesty of Christ, and establishment of His kingdom, filled their minds. They did not go back on the past, for they held the testimony of the earthly human life of Christ to be sufficient without any recapitulation of theirs. Not what Christ had been in His humiliation, but what He had become in His resurrection, and what He was to be in His approaching manifestation, were the subjects of their witness-bearing. When Matthias was chosen to be an apostle, it was important that he had "companied with the disciples all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and went out among them, beginning from the baptism of John unto the day that He was received up." Yet the main point of testimony to which the previous knowledge of Christ was to give force was His resurrection. Belief in Jesus as the Messiah of the Jewish people, the Saviour of Israel, was the faith the apostles sought at first to create; and those who, with whatever imperfect knowledge of Christ's earthly human life they began, professed this faith, were received into the membership of the Church by baptism.

During this earliest period the need for written and detailed accounts of the Lord's life on earth does not seem to have been felt. If converts who knew little about the work of Christ and His teaching desired information, the apostles were ready to give it from their own personal knowledge. The details of His ethical teaching, the evidences of His personal dignity and Divine authority, the miracles, the sufferings of Christ, were not forgotten. But they were viewed as important, not so much in themselves as for the proof they gave that Jesus was the Messiah promised through the prophets. His dignity and life in heaven, His power made manifest in the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, were the great facts on which faith was to rest. The Christ that was to be would not walk in the lonely ways of humiliation and suffering: He would reign. Nor had His life ceased to be visible: it was in His people. Their energy continued it, widened it. By and by the world should see Him in His glory. —

There was accordingly no formal attempt made in the first decade to gather and arrange the reminiscences of our Lord's life on earth. We read of no conference of those who had been witnesses throughout of all that Christ did and taught. Things began well with the conversion

of thousands on the day of Pentecost; and the method of preaching which had been so successful was followed. The apostles found a way of commending the faith of Christ which was suited to the time and was made availing by the Spirit. Their gospel was one of faith and hope, the glad tidings of a new age. Though they had known Christ after the flesh, yet now they knew Him in a higher stage of His mediatorial life. Narratives of the human life of Christ were not hastily compiled, for it seemed premature to close the record. In a short time there would be more to tell. Those who despised the lowly Saviour would soon be amazed by the revelation of His Divine glory. The outlook was pointed by Paul: "The Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: then we that are alive, that are left, shall together with them be caught up in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord" (1 Thess. iv. 16, 17).

Now, after the first two decades there was a gradual departure from the hope of an immediate appearance of Christ and end of the æon. This changed the point of view from which the whole facts of Christianity were regarded; and mean-

while a new generation was growing up, and needing to be informed of the character, deeds, and sayings of the Saviour. Further, as the Gentiles came under the influence of the new religion, the need of memorials of the life of Christ must have been pressingly felt among them. For Greeks had keen interest in the personality of those they admired. The biographies composed by Plutarch had great vogue from the time of their publication in the first century; and the place which they filled for hero-worshipping Greeks could not long remain void so far as that life was concerned from which the hopes of the new age took their rise.

Again, the relation of the Christians in Judæa to the old Hebrew religion is to be considered. The apostles and those who in the early years joined the Christian society, had no desire to separate themselves from the temple and from Judaism. They believed that the nation would as a whole repent of the great crime of putting Christ to death, accept Him as the Messiah, and so become ready for the "restoration of all things" at His return. But this expectation, while it gave significance to many of our Lord's sayings, as for example, that He was not sent save to the lost sheep of the house of Israel, and that He came not to destroy the law but to fulfil

it, also blurred and made almost incomprehensible many other things that fell from His lips. Clinging to the temple and the ritual of the Mosaic law, they could not understand why the Lord should have said regarding the temple, "Seest thou these great buildings? There shall not be left here one stone upon another, which shall not be thrown down"; nor again, what He said to the woman of Samaria, "Believe Me, the hour cometh, when neither in this mountain nor in Jerusalem shall ye worship the Father." His condemnation of the Pharisees with their fastidious keeping of the law, His consent to Roman dominion, in the saying, "Render unto Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's," His command to the young ruler to sell all that he had and give to the poor, and generally His indifference to earthly honour, state, and power, were equally difficult to comprehend. But as the disciples began to perceive that the Hebrew nation was bent on rejecting a second time their Divine Deliverer, that the temple was becoming the headquarters of those most bitterly opposed to the Christian faith, that Rome was indeed less hostile than the Sanhedrin, that persecution, not success, was to be the lot of believers, fresh light was thrown on those sayings of Christ which had seemed difficult and paradoxical. A full record of our Lord's

sayings would have been confounding to those who became Christians expecting that the Messianic kingdom was soon to be set up. Humanly speaking, a gospel compiled at that stage would have been imperfect, almost fragmentary. Reminiscences which one and another had clearly in their minds would have seemed doubtful, incredible. The first written narrative was therefore happily deferred till the notions of an earthly kingdom to be set up in Jerusalem by Christ had been left behind. The whole substance of our Gospels was meanwhile vividly remembered by the witnesses. As need arose, fact after fact, parable after parable was related. But a generation at least had to pass before the recollections were brought together with a sense of comprehension, and that consent of the understanding and feeling apart from which no Gospel of the life of Christ, properly speaking, could have been given to the world.

Weiss has dated the publication of the original report, an Aramaic Gospel, the basis of that which we have as St. Matthew's, about A.D. 67. It is, of course, on testimony long after date, that of Irenæus and Eusebius, that he rests; but there seems no reason to doubt that "some seven-and-thirty years after the death of Jesus a personal witness put on record His most important utter-

ances and deeds, as well as a large number of the more significant events of His life.”<sup>1</sup> Very soon after this we may place the publication of the Gospel of Mark, which, according to Clement of Alexandria, was written in Rome for the Romans. Again relying on tradition so far as it is borne out by internal evidence, we believe the Gospel to have been compiled to no small extent from the recollections of St. Peter, and to have been published before the fall of Jerusalem, say about A.D. 69. The Third Gospel, that of Luke, is later, as may be inferred from the introduction. The date to which it has been assigned is previous to A.D. 80. Finally, the publication of the Gospel according to St. John must be referred to some year in the decade between A.D. 90 and A.D. 100. At what time the original Aramaic Gospel of Matthew was brought into its present form there is no certain tradition. From Justin Martyr we gather that in the earlier half of the second century all the four Gospels, as we have them, were received as genuine, and read in the churches.

It appears, then, that previous to any narrative of the life of Christ in an orderly written form, almost all the epistles of Paul had been published, and probably also the Epistle of James

<sup>1</sup> Weiss, *The Life of Christ*, p. 39. (Clark.)

and the Epistle to the Hebrews. Now, in the two last mentioned we find traces of oral reports relating to the life and sayings of our Lord, differing somewhat from those contained in any of the Gospels. For example, in Heb. v. 7, we read: "Who in the days of His flesh, having offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto Him that was able to save Him from death, and having been heard for His godly fear, though He was a Son, yet learned He obedience by the things which He suffered." The reference is apparently to the anguish in Gethsemane. In the Gospels, however, we read: "Jesus began to be sorrowful and sore troubled. Then saith He unto them, My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death" (Matt. xxvi. 37, 38); and "being in an agony He prayed more earnestly: and His sweat became as it were great drops of blood, falling down upon the ground" (Luke xxii. 44). The "strong crying and tears" must have been heard of by the writer of the epistle through another report. On the other hand, frequent references in this epistle to the manner of Christ's death are derived from sources used by the evangelists. Turning to the Epistle of James, we find at least one saying of Christ's which is not preserved in any of the Gospels. It occurs in ch. i. 12:



“Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he hath been approved, he shall receive the crown of life, which *the Lord* promised to them that love Him.” The promise of a crown of life has various parallels in the Gospels; but singularly the only place in which it appears literally is Rev. ii. 10: “Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee the crown of life.” It would appear that the promise which James quotes was one he had heard of through the Apostle John. Now the Epistle of James is mainly ethical, and touches on many points of duty enjoined by Christ. But it is rare to find His exact words given; and even when they are, as at ch. v. 12, they are not quoted as Christ’s. In Hebrews, again, almost the whole teaching in regard to our Lord lies beyond the range within which the first three Gospels, at least, confine their portraiture of Christ. This epistle shows that even while the recollections of our Lord’s earthly human life were being gathered, and the first written Gospel was taking shape, another series of ideas formed part of the common faith and intelligence of Christians. And the Epistle to the Hebrews is especially important, because it proves that this supra-human history of Christ, as fulfilling the Old Testament, was that on which, about A.D. 67,

reliance was placed for the confirmation of Jewish Christians in the faith. The writer does not go back on the life of our Lord on earth, and select those sayings and deeds which might impress a new generation with His Divine authority and His claim on the faith of Israel. He does not recall manifestations of Christ's glory and power, which had roused the enthusiasm of those who witnessed them. The expiation by our Lord of the sin of men, and the priestly and redeeming power He has gained through suffering, His entrance into the Holy place not made with hands, His ascension to a place higher than the angels on the right hand of the Majesty on high, are the facts, recognisable only by faith, on which this writer rests. Like James, he calls for belief in the Lord Jesus Christ as the Lord of Glory, whose coming is to bring salvation.

During the decade from A.D. 50 to A.D. 60, the Gentile churches received the instruction on which faith was based, not entirely, but to a great extent, from Paul and the evangelists who caught enthusiasm from him. It was he who gave their Christian belief its character at the outset; and although he came in the course of years to be tolerant of any who preached Christ, even in envy and strife (Phil. i. 15), he was at

first exceedingly anxious to keep his converts in the doctrine he himself had taught. It is, then, at this stage important to determine what Paul meant by the expression "my gospel," how it was related to the earlier teaching and to the narratives of the evangelists.

The discourse of Paul at Antioch of Pisidia already reviewed<sup>1</sup> must be taken as a type of the instruction he was in the habit of giving to his hearers in the synagogues; and even the outline shows that he made the story of the Lord's life a feature in touching on various points in the testimony of John Baptist, on the rejection of Christ by the people of Jerusalem and their rulers, His crucifixion, entombment, and resurrection, and subsequent appearances. Now we must assume that the epistles follow and supplement a scheme of teaching of which the address at Antioch is an example. Not one of the epistles which have come down to us is a first lesson in Christianity; all are for those who have received the gospel, and have become by profession members of the Church. We cannot gather from the contents of Paul's writings how he laid the foundation of his gospel, for he nowhere thinks it necessary to restate the whole instruction he gave either to Israelites or to

See p. 87.

heathens in order that they might become intelligent believers. But one who made so close a study of the events attending the death and resurrection of Christ, who had taken great pains to discover the precise words used by our Lord in instituting the Sacrament of the Supper, who wrote of Christ that He "being in the form of God, counted it not a prize to be on an equality with God, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of men" (Phil. ii. 6, 7); and again, "When the fulness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law,"—this writer, it is clear, did recognise the importance of the earthly human life of our Lord in relation to His saving work. And what he himself recognised as a part of the good tidings he must have embodied in his teaching.

It remains true that in the epistles of Paul there is no quotation from the parables, and that references made to the discourses, as at Rom. xii. 14, xiii. 10, xiv. 9 (cf Matt. v. 44, xxii. 32, 40), are not directly in the way of citation. While Old Testament passages are given generally with notes of their origin, for instance in Rom. ix. 25, "As he saith also in Hosea"; ver. 29, "And as Isaiah hath said before"; or vaguely, ver. 33, "Even as it is written," we find no sayings of Christ

cited literally as they stand in any of the Gospels, with a note of quotation, "As the Lord said." In one place we find a general reference to Christ's words reported in Matt. x. 9, 10: "Get you no gold nor silver nor brass in your purses; . . . for the labourer is worthy of his food." This is recalled in 1 Cor. ix. 14: "Even so did the Lord ordain that they which proclaim the gospel, should live of the gospel." In 1 Tim. v. 18, the quotation, "The labourer is worthy of his hire," is made with the introduction, "For the Scripture saith"; and we must suppose that a gospel writing is meant. The passage beginning with 1 Thess. iv. 15, "For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord," may be admitted, as Professor J. T. Marshall contends, to be a reminiscence of the discourse in Luke xxi. But it is by no means a literal quotation; and the statement relating to the institution of the Lord's Supper, 1 Cor. xi. 23 ff., remains, as already said, unique in its parallelism with the narrative of Luke.

Now this last instance shows that the infrequency of quotations from the discourses of our Lord was not due to any unwillingness of Paul's to invoke the supreme authority of Christ. When he gives the terms of the institution of the Supper, which he had "received of the

Lord," he clearly implies that the matter is settled. We can see, however, that arguing in the epistles, not only with converts from heathenism, but also with Israelites whose faith he wished to confirm, he did well to rest as far as possible on the scriptures of the Old Testament. And perhaps the want of an accredited history of the life of Christ was a further reason for the fewness of his quotations. St. Paul could not say, "As you find it written in the memoirs of the apostles"; and unless he referred to a full accessible and authoritative scripture regarding the Lord, the purpose would not be served. It seems clear that, while on certain points, like the Lord's Supper, he had arrived at a precise knowledge of what fell from Christ, in other cases his information was not precise. He had never been long enough with any of the Twelve to receive a full account of the deeds and sayings of Christ, and to fix them accurately in his memory. He may not, therefore, have chosen to quote many of the sayings. He was watched in Corinth by those who claimed to be the party "of Christ." In other towns, Philippi for instance, his teaching was criticised sharply; and he would refrain from exposing Christ to criticism by using quotations which might be cavilled at. This, however, does not imply in

the least that his final appeal was other than to the words of Christ. We leave the inquiry with the conviction that Paul certainly based his gospel on the historical facts, and derived the ethical teaching and theology which his epistles contain from the sayings and discourses of our Lord. It is contended by Professor J. T. Marshall that he had before him the original Aramaic Gospel. The evidence, however, is hardly sufficient to warrant such a conclusion.

But, assuming that Paul's teaching included a recapitulation of the main facts of our Lord's life and His great sayings, we have still before us the question, In what sense Paul's gospel was distinct and was the fruit of his personal inspiration.

There can be no doubt that he conceived his gospel proper as beginning where the interpretations of those who knew Christ in His earthly human life no longer served. He distinctly says (Gal. i. 11, 12): "I make known to you, brethren, as touching the gospel which was preached by me, that it is not after man. For neither did I receive it from man, nor was I taught it, but [it came to me] through revelation (*δι' ἀποκαλύψεως*) of Jesus Christ." The vision or unveiling of Jesus Christ to himself personally gave him, he says, the essence of his gospel.

Now the teaching of the apostles in the early period affirmed that by raising from the dead Jesus who had been crucified, God had made Him manifest as both Lord and Messiah; that Christ having ascended to the heaven was to be there till the times of restoration of all things; that in no other than Christ is there salvation; that being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, He bestows that Divine Spirit on men. If, then, we are to find in the teaching of Paul a special element, it must add something to that which the earlier inspiration had given to the Church. Now, returning to the first reported address of St. Paul, we find a hint of the special truth he claimed to have received, in the words: "By Him every one that believeth is justified from all things from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses." Christ had come to bring men, every man who believed, into a relation to God which the law of Moses was incompetent to give. It had previously seemed, even to the apostles, that the Mosaic law covered in its reconciling and sanctifying design the whole ground of Divine grace, and that the work of Christ was to be done along with the Mosaic law, in the way of making it effectual as a means of reconciling men to God.



Paul's revelation is that Christ transcends Moses, has a mission, a power, a redeeming energy which pass beyond Mosaism or any purpose Mosaism served. The word "justify" is laid hold of by Paul at the very outset, as describing an effect common to both the Mosaic law and the work of Christ, so that the transcendency of the latter may be clearly seen. Israelites reflecting on what Paul had said would soon perceive the limit of the law's power to justify. There were offences from which escape was impossible by any ceremonial purgation, by any sacrifice. Breaches of the great commandments of God could not be expiated; the wages of sin of this kind was death.

And every man was guilty. As Micah had said, so every one who knew his own heart would say: "Wherewith shall I come before the Lord and bow myself before the high God? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?" To these questions, which the Mosaic law could not answer, which no prophet answered so as to bring the peace of assured acceptance with God, Paul had seen Christ to be the answer. To declare this, to make known that for every

sinner, for all sin, there was justification through Christ, — this was his gospel. There was, in addition, the idea of eternal life, which, in speaking to the Gentiles at Antioch, Paul offered to them through Christ. The bold assurance which by revelation of the Lord he was able to give, was that the remission of all sins, entire deliverance from condemnation, and a life in God extending into the boundless heavenly spaces, would be enjoyed by all who exercised faith in the Lord Jesus Christ as the Christ of God.

But this, though it was indeed Paul's gospel, the fruit of that inspiration which gave him unique insight into the purpose of Divine grace, is not to be dissociated from the revelation made by Christ Himself during His ministry on earth. Paul understood, interpreted, declared what the Spirit had given him of the things of Christ. The gospel was his only in the sense that he was the instrument of the Spirit in making known what Christ Himself had meant and declared in His proclamation of the kingdom of God, by parables, by statements regarding His own mission, by the terms in which He invited all to come to Him that they might have rest and life. In no way did Paul impose upon the words, the endurance, and death of Christ, signi-

ficance which did not belong to them. To suppose that the gospel as taught by Jesus was one thing, and that Paul's is another, would be to mistake entirely the spirit in which the apostle sought, by most prayerful study, the illumination that made him the great evangelist, not for the Gentiles only, but also for the children of Abraham.

Having seen the truth as it is in Christ, Paul had boundless confidence in his reading of it, as the one gospel, by the faith of which alone the liberty and fulness of the life in Christ are to be enjoyed. Writing to the Galatians, he affirmed, in startling words, the claim of that message on the faith of all: "Though we or an angel from heaven should preach unto you any gospel other than that which we preached unto you, let him be anathema." The world's gospel, the glorious gospel of the blessed God, the gospel of justification for all men from every transgression, was in Galatia being dragged back into the narrow prison of Mosaism, made conterminous with a system that provided no means of absolution from the real sins, the mortal guilt by which the consciences of men were burdened. The Saviour of mankind was to be a mere helper of the circumcised, an additional glory to those who gloried in the flesh. All that Paul had

received in Divine revelation, all he lived for, had come into peril. He wrote like one wrestling for the very life of humanity against the reign of death.

To the Thessalonian Christians Paul had preached the same gospel. They were, indeed, mostly converts from heathenism, and for this reason, perhaps, the apostle does not, in either of his letters to them, use the word "justification," in speaking of the saving work of Christ. He says, those who know not God and obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus, "shall suffer punishment, even eternal destruction from the face of the Lord and from the glory of His might" (2 Thess. i. 9). Thus he describes the result, not of simple unbelief, but of deliberate rejection of Christ, and paints the doom which seemed to impend over the antichristian Jews. His gospel of light and salvation had its background of darkness and wrath. But to believers he wrote: "We are bound to give thanks to God alway for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, for that God chose you from the beginning unto salvation in sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth: whereunto He called you through our gospel." And he exhorts them: "Stand fast, and hold the traditions which ye were taught, whether by word or by epistle of ours" (2 Thess. ii. 13—

15). With regard to the Christian salvation, other expressions are: "Jesus, who delivereth us from the wrath to come"; "God, who calleth you into His own kingdom and glory"; "God appointed us not unto wrath, but unto the obtaining of salvation, through our Lord Jesus Christ who died for us." In these and other places the blessings of redemption are spoken of solely as enjoyed by believers who have been chosen by God and have accepted the word of the message, "not as the word of man, but, as it is in truth, the word of God" (1 Thess. ii. 13). But the breadth of the gospel is made clear in one passage, where Paul complains of the Jews that they are "contrary to all men; forbidding us to speak to the Gentiles that they may be saved." His gospel had met with opposition, because it was universal. The enmity of the Jews, of which he has to complain, shows what his message had been. The same spirit as they had exhibited in killing the Lord Jesus and the prophets, was now shown in the attempt to destroy the gospel of forgiveness and life offered to all men through Jesus Christ.

It is, however, in the Epistle to the Romans that the splendid breadth of that message, which Paul gloried to proclaim as his gospel, is most eloquently and distinctively set forth. In the

world, he says, with the law, or without the law, there is sin and the reign of death. Through one trespass the judgment came on all men to condemnation. All the world is under judgment; all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. But through one act of righteousness the free gift came unto all men to justification of life. That act of righteousness was the death of Christ for the ungodly. The word of faith is nigh to all. "If thou shalt confess with thy mouth Jesus as Lord, and shalt believe in thy heart that God raised Him from the dead, thou shalt be saved." "There is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, and is rich unto all that call upon Him." Where sin was, grace came; "where sin abounded, grace did abound more exceedingly; that, as sin reigned in death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord." Such is the gospel, which by familiarity appears to us no longer wonderful. It was Paul's apocalypse of Christ.

And his message is completed by a return to the earthly life of the Lord. Paul teaches that the life "in Christ" is a Christlike life. In 1 Thess. reference is made to the imitation of Christ. In Galatians the apostle says: "Bear ye one another's

burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ." In 2 Cor. he urges the grace of liberality by the appeal: "Ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that ye through His poverty might become rich." In epistle after epistle the energy of souls justified and redeemed is directed into the channel made by the human life of Christ. As He was meek and gentle, so should His followers be. As Christ pleased not Himself, so should every Christian please his neighbour for his good unto edifying; and each should grow up through the knowledge of the Son of God unto a full-grown man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ. We may say, therefore, that the whole tendency of the writings of Paul is to send us for practical directions to the life and words of the Lord. His way of instruction is to begin with a general statement of the facts of the transcendent life of Christ. Then he affirms that in this Christ, who died and rose again, there is justification from all sins, redemption, adoption into the family of God, eternal salvation and life. He calls for faith in Christ, who gave Himself for us according to the will of God the Father. This faith established, he bids the believer look to the Lord as his example, and obey His law. Were the narrative Gospels ren-

dered unnecessary by the epistles of Paul? No; the desire for them was kindled, and the need for them made imperative. Thus the most original of the New Testament writers, he who gave to the world the great doctrine which in a sense unveiled the gospel, stands, as it were, to point the churches of his time, and to point the world, to One greater than himself, whose shoe's latchet he was not worthy to unloose. He comes after, as John the Baptist went before, to say, "Behold, the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world." For a little, when belief is new, he will have his converts to be imitators of himself, as he also is of Christ Jesus. But it is only for a time. When his epistles are written, when his work is done, he makes way for the evangelists, who come one after another to show us Christ. It was not by accident that the epistles of Paul preceded the Gospels. The order will often be followed in men's apprehension of the truths regarding Christ for the right development of their faith.

The statement made by Dr. Weiss, that Christian faith has grown up "from the basis of the apostolic preaching," implies that their preaching is represented in its totality by the epistles. From this opinion we have seen good cause to dissent; and it follows that the Christian



faith would not have remained just as it is, "losing no part of what is its deepest foundation," if the epistles alone had come down to us. It cannot be affirmed that the historical notices of our Lord's life embodied in the epistles are sufficient foundation for a practical and unassailable faith. We need what St. Peter and St. Paul gave their hearers by oral communication, but did not find it necessary to rehearse in their writings; and this we have in the reports of the evangelists.

At the same time the practice of the apostles, who stood so much nearer the fountain-head than we stand, who knew the mind of Christ, whose reverence for their Divine Master would not have suffered any personal considerations to interfere with their obedience to His will, must always be taken as throwing the best light on the meaning of His words. Certain interpretations put by Tolstoi, for instance, on the sayings, "Judge not," "Resist not evil," and the like, have no warrant in the example of Paul; and the tendency to neglect almost everything in the New Testament excepting the Gospels, moves towards an imperfect Christianity.

Another modern fashion, that which sets up a contrast between St. Paul and St. John, is equally to be condemned. At the close of a long life, when

he could enter on the labours of all the apostles and evangelists, St. John had unquestionably a most honourable place among the teachers of the world. When doctrine was well advanced, and its development set the facts and sayings of the Lord in a new light, it was his to bring out the consummate harmony of the whole elements of Christian revelation. The light he conveys is at once broad and penetrating. But it shines not to eclipse or to impugn the earlier Gospels and writings of the apostles. It reveals the same Jesus, enforces the same doctrine, the same hope : “ God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have eternal life.”

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